HELEN
OF TROY, N.Y.

WILFRID S.
JACKSON



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HELEN OF TROY, N. Y.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NINE POINTS
OF THE LAW

HELEN
OF TROY, N. Y.

By
WILFRID S. JACKSON

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
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HELEN OF TROY, N. Y.

CHAPTER I

DINNER AT THE INN

THROUGHOUT the great library at Lincoln's Inn; round and about its bays and recesses; at the tables that line the nave; overhead in the iron galleries that lift the insatiable student to the less accessible stores of learning; by bookstand and by shelf, was the sound of a sober shutting of tomes and a rustle of gathered papers: and in the lobby the scuffling of the misappropriated umbrella, and on the staircases the echo of departing feet, indicated the approach of the dinner hour. The sun setting in his "wonted west" struck across the fields and through the high set oriel window, the book dust dancing in his broken

rays--dust released that day perhaps from years of imprisonment in the volumes of some long defunct pundit and now to settle slowly, a visible oblivion, on some that but today were in the pride of use.

Students in a pale heat of study frowned at the beams with dazed eyes, reminded of the outer world and of the inner man, and with sigh or satisfaction pocketing notebooks, and returning volumes to librarians with whispered colloquy, passed over the softly clanging gratings to the doors. An occasional reader lingered in places, perhaps long past his obligation to keep terms, or else one of those unready mortals whom the call of time always finds with a charged pen and a congested brain; within cry of a far-chased reference; or at best in the middle of the chapter.

Of these an Oriental gentleman in a green turban, and a frock coat beginning, though East is East and West is West, to tone with it; and gold-rimmed spectacles surcharged with gold-rimmed pince-nez, was assimilating Blackstone against time, his small brown hands commenting copiously on the numerous commentaries of Mr. Sergeant Stephen, his patient blurred eyes and

indeed his head, following the text across and across the page. In a foreign land, in the adytum of an entrenched caste, contending myopically against an English not taught him in Calcutta, and a Latin not taught anywhere, he might have drawn tears of admiration from Bruce's spider, the industrious ant, the busy bee, or other portentously patient insect analogue of himself.

"Like a blind nigger in a dark cellar looking for a black cat that isn't there," quoted Mr. Raggleston to himself as he sat looking at him, we fear with contempt, though he might have been better employed in view of the certain fact that unless he himself could assimilate those same Commentaries and a considerable tale of Equities, Torts, Easements, and what-not to boot, he would have to exert all his talents to live within the law instead of on it or by it.

Decidedly his was not one of those charged and over-engaged intellects that cannot leave the pursuit of knowledge when the clock strikes.

Still less, unhappily, his chance of joining that favoured and higher order to whom examinations are but memories, and whose golden leisure

is spent at the Benchers' tables over the Society's port.

Examinations had been the bane of Mr. Raggleston's life.

As a small boy under private tuition, before the attractions and distractions of school had opened the many alluring by-paths that diverge from the road to knowledge, he had passed into the *Britannia.* But he had never passed out. And with a passionate disappointment it was yet early years for him to feel but already too late to remedy, he had been forced to leave a company the prodigy and pick of human young, who must be, age for age, a full year ahead of any class of schoolboy in the kingdom, and as sound in wind and limb and eye and tooth as the untutored savage who has to catch his wild goat by the hair —and eat him afterwards.

Four years at school on the modern side had passed all too quickly, and the second line of defence had come in view. But the thin red line had bristled with as many difficulties on the hither side as with bayonets on the outer, and again the "small but well armed body of examiners" had repulsed the very poorly conceived

assault of Mr. Raggleston and returned him upon the hands of an enraged parent.

War breaking out, South Africa kindly took him over and in the course of the next couple of years campaigning gave him many hard and beneficial knocks; but all good things come to an end, as his parent noted on the declaration of peace, and an enlightened knowledge of agricultural prospects at home next suggested to him that if his son couldn't be anything else surely he could be a farmer.

But there is always matrimony. And the pursuit of an ineligible *partie* next engaging Mr. Raggleston's attention, a family council decided that he would be as dear to them and dearer if lost to sight; and since the little study he had given to the home counties had convinced our friend that he could be at least equally unsuccessful anywhere else, he was shipped to California to grow oranges with about as much aptitude for the work and likelihood of making money as a Kanaka in Wall Street.

Arrived in the land of the dollar, Jack's ranch, as the innocents at home called it, had risen on his astonished gaze as a piece of dusty

soil some hundred yards square, and his vague dreams of an Hesperides, a lotos-land where golden fruit bore down the laden boughs, had vanished in a wink.

"First the bud and then the flower," but there is something anterior to the bud when you are trying to raise the fruits of the earth, and that is the tree. Not seeing how he was to live while the trees were growing, Mr. Raggleston lost no time in selling his fruit-farm for a dollar in the hand for every pound from the parental pocket, and made tracks from a township where he was regarded as a "hobo;" and the successful store-keepers of the great democracy spat on the side-walk from their high swinging buggies.

San Francisco naturally drew him. New friends and the remains of his patrimony introduced him to a minute share in a small trading venture and he was promoted part owner with some congenial spirits in as unseaworthy a schooner as ever was offered to the hungry seas.

Her inevitable end, however, did not involve Mr. Raggleston, who was not born to be drowned; for, returning from a highly pleasurable and entirely unsuccessful cruise in the

Islands, he had read in an English paper that the star whose planetary attraction had drawn him into her sphere and then deflected his course to California, had at length come into collision with one or more of her satellites and that a brilliant meteoric combustion was promised for the coming season at home. Jack Raggleston's chivalry was roused. For the first time he communicated his position to his father and therewith his instant duty and his needs. He was not kept waiting. A prompt and flat refusal of assistance came on the wings of the post.

Hot-headed, obstinate, and enterprising enough when his passions were engaged, his flame, which had been dead for months, sprang up again to a quite respectable heat, and the ardent champion of beauty in distress shipped as a foremast hand on a Glasgow ship and arrived in England to find the *cause célèbre* mere printed matter dead and filed, and the lady, with a greatly enhanced reputation, drawing a salary, and a following, on the boards, that made her not only independent, but even forgetful, of his devotion.

Home again, in a blue jersey and sea boots and a bundle of kit under his arm, he had entered

headlong his old club in St. James's and laid out the commissionaire who, disdaining words, had tried to eject him.

Fortunately for the hall-porter, who was advanced in years and girth, an old friend and schoolfellow had appeared in the nick, attracted with other members by the shindy, and had guaranteed the genuineness of the true British tar. Lord Billinghurst, some years his junior, had always been Raggleston's delighted admirer and follower, and now Raggleston's stained jumper and rubbers, and violent justification of himself, received his whole hearted approval.

They had renewed their interrupted friendship. Lord Billinghurst had given him lodging and, after the inevitable ructions caused by Raggleston's home-coming, and the method of it, and the why of it, and he had been given a final chance before that deadly business of "washing the hands of him",—a threat that always suggests the ne'er-do-weel going down the sink—he had been induced to do final battle against those who guard the portals of the professions and to read for the Bar with his friend.

But it was a tame business. He had, indeed,

by this period a working conviction that laws were not made to be broken; but to study law for the law's sake seemed an unnecessary rubbing in of the lesson. He could recognise the force of the shackles, but their forging and application did not challenge his admiration nor so far engage his attention.

Mr. Raggleston sat and gloomed, his elbows squared on the table, his frowning brows bent on the enduring and unnecessarily ink-stained Oriental, who, with a patient grief, was reckoning the ungathered pages of his author. But dinner was too imminent. Submitting himself to the endless race against Time that urges on the hag-ridden West, the student fell darkling from his dim pursuit and took his way to the unclean tables of the uncompromising Inn. Raggleston rose and followed. He could perform that part of his novitiate at any rate—he would do his duty as a trencher-man and show a misbelieving parent that he was not wholly ungrateful for his renewed opportunities.

He crossed the terrace to the Hall and found one other belated diner struggling into his gown in the robing lobby.

"Hullo, Bill," said Raggleston, recognising his ally, "I thought you had finished your feasting for this term."

"I thought so, too," replied his lordship, "but I never could count beyond five. My sister scores for me as a rule, but she is down in Sussex. Come on in, they've all got their nose-bags on."

Endued with their gowns they entered the Hall where one long table and half another were lined with students similarly draped, and grace was being said from the upper end.

They dropped into the last mess, their quartette made out by the Indian gentleman from the library and a typical young German with moustache on the Imperial pattern, a pink face, and eyes half sleepy, half surprised; who bowed his big body stiffly but courteously to the staring Raggleston ere he sat down.

But Lord Billinghurst knew him and introduced his brother John Bull. Presently, under cover of the noise, he told Raggleston that Freiherr von Deggendorf was attached to the Bavarian Embassy.

"They are next door to us in Arlington Street, and old Neucassel brought him in the other day,

hearing that I was at Lincoln's Inn, and asked me to show him the ropes. They're not happy unless they're grinding at something. He is destined for the Embassy, I imagine. His people have interests or connexions in England. So here's a Dutchman to add to your Levanters, Raggles, my boy."

"And yet I'm expected to get a living," grumbled Raggleston. "We are ruined by German cheap labour. That darky's binnacles may see him on another course, but hang me if I take the wash of a Dutchman. What are you going to drink, Bill?"

The butler was waiting to supply the bottle of claret or port which the Society apportions to each mess.

"At bottle among four of us. Heaven send no more of us. Ask your Deutscher."

But the German called for beer. Whatever he drank he must have enough of. The Indian possessed himself of the water-jug.

Lord Billinghurst would have a glass of beer to show that there was no ill feeling, but as for dining—

"How can you expect a chap to dine at six

when he has breakfasted at twelve and lunched at four?" he asked fretfully, and contented himself with signing the attendance-list.

So it came about, unfortunately, that a bottle of the Society's excellent claret, appointed to afford two glasses apiece to four sober members of the Inn, fell to the sole throttle of Mr. Raggleston. The generous juice warmed his latent emotions and quickly cleared his spirits from the clogging weight of his studies.

The Indian gentleman lent a gleaming attention to the windy discourse of the neighbouring mess —four of his kind spinning phrases from the text-books: a prefatory "notwithstanding your remarks" or "it appears to my seeming" launching an inapposite string of words upon a cross-conversation which, aiming at the abstract, wandered widely into the inane.

Lord Billinghurst read the "Globe" folded in duodecimo upon his empty plate, and favoured his companions with comic extracts from its humorous reporters. But the fashionable intelligence yielded the news this evening. He nudged Raggleston suddenly.

"I say, Jack," he said, "Miss Heimer is in Lon-

don again. Look here." He showed his paper—"Miss Helen B. Heimer, of Troy, N. Y., arrived at the Grosvenor today, and leaves tomorrow for Cowes."

Raggleston, with his mouth full, betrayed a lively interest.

"Wonder when she'll be in town again," he said as soon as he could. "Be a pal, Bill, and leave her to me. You'll get plenty more chances, but where am I to find another smiling heiress?"

"She smiled at you and not on you, I expect. I like Miss Heimer myself. She's a decent sort of girl and not bad looking considering her other million recommendations."

"A bit swarthy," said Raggleston reflectively.

"No blacker than you are," said his lordship genially. "You'd make a sweet couple."

"Just what I think," replied Raggleston, calmly swigging his claret.

"You be—sugared," said Lord Billinghurst, pocketing his paper. "Besides, *nemo plus juris*" —what is it? *"ad alium—"*

"Oh, shut up."

"Well, what would you say at the Apollo?"

"That's ancient history—I was young and fool-

ish, like you. After all, what can a fellow do, Billinghurst? I shall never make anything of this business. I take no interest in it."

"That's where it is," said his confidant sagely; "you ought to take an interest. It's all rot you know, Raggles. You can do anything you want to do. You were keen, or at least you meant work, when you joined, and you passed your Roman law easily enough. Anything you really intend—"

"Well, I intend to marry Miss Heimer. There you are. I'm provided for—"

He turned his bottle upside down over his glass.

Lord Billinghurst had a generous belief in his friend's ability to put through any scheme he set his hand to, and had, with perfect good nature, brought the impecunious Raggleston into acquaintance with Miss Heimer—an immensely rich German-American whom a family henchman, on a hint circuitous from headquarters, had brought across his own path.

But by advantage of his associations he had, in spite of his juniority to Raggleston and lesser knowledge of the world geographical, a fairly

solid grasp of certain principles of its wise men; and though the word of advice he had thrown out was all he could well venture on, he already saw our friend Jack Raggleston coming heavily to the ground between the evasive stools; and he shook his head.

"She won't look at you," he said.

Raggleston had opened his mouth to retort when the voice of the German struck across the table:

"You speak of Miss Heimer," he said in stiff accents. "Your pardon, I haf the friendship off Miss Heimer; I haf not heard her speak off marriage. If you speak off marriage and off Miss Heimer, of Troy, Julius von Deggendorf is—wie sagen Sie?—involved."

His hand confirmed the moustache in its aggressive angle and the rigidly vertical backbone and contracted eyes spoke volumes for his outraged propriety and *amour propre*.

Lord Billinghurst burst out laughing. The astonishment and resentment on Raggleston's face was too much for him, sitting with poised glass, the words struck dumb on his lips.

For one moment he half expected to see the

wine-glass dashed in the fearless old fashion across the table, but it came slowly to rest under the hand.

"Ruined by German cheap labour," Billinghurst heard him murmur again as he himself cried out on the rival claimant:

"Hang it all. Do you know Miss Heimer, von Deggendorf? I had no notion of that. You mustn't be annoyed with us. Mr. Raggleston and I are great admirers of her—of hers. Do I understand that we are to congratulate you? Come and have some coffee in the Common Room and tell us all about it."

The German struggled to find his words or to make his mind clear on the subject, and took a glance round him.

The delights of controversy had at length drawn his Indian neighbour into the folds of the inextricable anacolouthon (which the Foreign Office clerk not unreasonably regarded as a serpent). Grace was called before he could answer, and the students rose with a grinding of benches, von Deggendorf bowing a formal assent to Lord Billinghurst, and that young gentleman, doubled

with laughter at the incident, followed the broad back, stiff with combativeness, down the hall.

"What did I tell you," he chuckled, as they shed their gowns. "Nothing like a thorough knowledge of legal maxims."

"Prior claim be dashed," growled Raggleston. "No Dutchman takes the wind out of my sails. I'd marry her now if she were a Hottentot and he were the "something" Kaiser. Pity we can't put poison in his coffee. But we'll pump him, Bill, and see how the land lies. We won't have our prospects shattered without knowing the reason why."

"Not much, we won't," agreed the ally, as they issued on the steps where the German awaited them in a cloak and soft black hat which put the finishing touch to Raggleston's disgust.

They crossed the gardens to the Common rooms, Billinghurst and the Freiherr bowing and backing ceremoniously at the swing-doors to the real edification of the hindered but never impatient Oriental, and von Deggendorf passing in first under protest, and his lordship hacking out at his friend's shins to draw his appreciation, they entered and seated themselves on a big couch

opposite one of the fireplaces; Billinghurst in the middle still sustaining the conversation—elemental antipathy guiding the others to opposite ends. In an armchair at Raggleston's corner sat an elderly member who had called in for a sherry and bitters on his way west.

He turned a good-humoured countenance on Raggleston's sulky one and made a temporary diversion by engaging him in talk.

"I have known the Fraulein Heimer two, three years in Homburg," von Deggendorf was saying. "She stay there of a summer with my cousine Baronin von Röder. I will go to visit the Fraulein in the Insel Wright this week, where she stay with friends of Fürst Neucassel, to whom I have the *Einfuhrung*. And your *Herr Freund*—he knows the Fraulein Heimer very well?"

"Oh, not as well as you do, I expect," said Billinghurst, smiling. But the Freiherr did not smile at all.

"It is bad to speak as does your *Herr Freund*—he is not a boy—*Bei uns*"—he said—and said no more; but one hand sought the absent hilt while the other pointed the gesture with the menacing moustache.

Lord Billinghurst regarded him with a frank amusement. "Pity they don't fight under the same rules," he thought. If it came to scrappin' Jack would wipe the floor with him."

Raggleston's neighbour had been putting questions and eliciting much emphatic dogma on matters military.

"Conscription—never," said Raggleston decidedly. "We give our services freely when required." He stopped short, fearing the appearance of quoting his own; for reference had been made at dinner to his service in the Yeomanry at the close of the South African war; the Freiherr had made interested enquiries and had received but short answers.

The German's uncompromising dislike and non-comprehension of the Anglo-Saxon individualism did not show itself so crudely as the like patriotic bias in the Englishman, but was fully as strong. The code of etiquette, of stated conduct under stated conditions, the formulas of introduction and greeting, the express degrees of intimate intercourse with relative, friend, or acquaintance, the set phrases in minor circumstances which bind all continental Europe and

form a common elementary education, make every-day relations between foreigners a matter of A B C.

The total want of any standard of manner or manners among ourselves, the impossibility of gauging or guessing the first move of the average Englishman, of knowing what his civility or incivility may imply; of placing him according to his courtesies or want of them, his style or his neglect of it, makes a barrier round him deeper than the channel and accentuates his independence; and lends him a ruggedness and eccentricity which is merely a defect in his national upbringing.

Von Deggendorf appeared to our friend Raggleston as a poker-backed Dutchman in an unforgiveable hat, and altogether too damned polite. Conscious of the antagonism between them he expected von Deggendorf to show what he himself was at no pains to conceal.

To the German, Raggleston with his rude stare, his headlong carriage, and worn dittos, represented unschooled individualism at the rawest, and he ached to see him under a Prussian drill sergeant, driven, bullied, and moulded till

he should have no soul to call his own and no instinct but obedience.

And here was Lord Billinghurst, heir to a marquisate, *"adel"* too, on his mother's side, unlike so much of this half-blooded English aristocracy, consorting with Raggleston without check or reserve, and even obviously admiring him.

Freiherr von Deggendorf fumed and wondered, and the clay feet of the British Colossus stuck out largely visible.

Raggleston had risen from his coffee and was standing against the empty grate, his big body resting on the mantel-piece, his hands thrust in his trouser-pockets half way to the elbows, an all-embracing yawn affording a fine view of his large and useful mouth.

Freiherr von Deggendorf shivered with antagonism and a shaft escaped involuntarily from the tense bow.

"Freely, you say," he said meaningly, "you got five shillings a day—nicht wahr?"

As a field officer at home he would have touched less.

Under ordinary conditions this would have

been an excellent joke, and Lord Billinghurst now threw up his legs and roared.

"It was a fat thing for you, Jack," he cried. "You'll never make it at the Bar."

But Raggleston had had the tail of his attention on his foe and had caught the animus. He flushed a savage red and let himself go.

"We were volunteers, remember. We don't fight under compulsion; driven in by the police, like a gang of condemned convicts."

"Steady the Buffs!" remonstrated Billinghurst, sitting up and turning on the German a look in which a civil alarm struggled with the sporting instinct.

There was room for both. The German looked as he felt—that he had received a blow in the face.

The elderly barrister took his rosy countenance up the room. He was in the vein to talk but not to argue.

For a minute none of them spoke. Raggleston was indifferent to the effect of his speech, Billinghurst curious to see the upshot, while von Deggendorf struggled with more than one obstacle to utterance. Mortally angry at the insult

to his cloth, the Kaiser's uniform, he was angry with himself for having drawn it, and now, under the influence of sudden indignation and the need of pungent and direct speaking, he was forced into acquaintance with the difficulty of conducting a row in a foreign tongue with any justice to oneself.

The *Muttersprache* would not at once be refused and his first natural words meeting with the uncovert smile of the country, his national excitability was scarcely to be governed.

Whence came the legend of German phlegm? Or do the nations alter? Freiherr von Deggendorf rose to his feet, his face suffused, his head erect, each individual hair charged and bristling, and clicking his heels together bowed some three inches from the vertical towards a point over Lord Billinghurst's head.

"I wish you goot evening, Lord Billinghurst," he said. "For your frient"—he struggled again for words, but Lord Billinghurst broke in—

"Don't go off like that, von Deggendorf," he said, taking him unceremoniously by the coat-tail in way of persuasion. "It's only Raggleston's pretty way of talking. We'll clear out of

here if you like, but let's go to Arlington Street. I want to hear some more about Miss Heimer."

The clutch at his tails did not tend to smooth the Freiherr's ruffled plumes, and he nearly vented a splutter of wrath. But he behaved nobly. He detached his coat from the over-familiar hand and moved to the door.

The "frient's" attitude had not changed except that his mouth instead of being widely opened was now very closely shut.

Lord Billinghurst was sprawled across the couch, his hand still extended after the retiring Freiherr.

"*Wenn*—if you go to Arlington Street, perhaps we meet later." The swing-door banged behind him, and the two were left facing one another.

CHAPTER II

THE MEANS TO DO ILL DEEDS

LORD BILLINGHURST looked comically at his ally.

"You have annoyed him, Jack. You shouldn't have said that."

"Confound it! You heard what he said to me."

"Do you think he meant to be nasty?"

"I know he did," said Raggleston, shouldering himself off the mantel-piece. "I saw it coming. They think us mercenaries, those fellows."

"Save us from all foreigners," said his lordship piously. "But I say," he continued, "this is serious about Miss Heimer. He's making the running—has been for long enough—and he is off to the Isle of Wight after her tomorrow unless we can stop him."

"He doesn't seem to have got very far in spite of his start; but I fear we shan't get any more information from that stable. Did he say he'd come round to you later?"

"He may have meant the Embassy, but perhaps he's coming after you, Jack, with an armed band of German waiters. Good business he hadn't his sticker on just now. He would have carved us unfortunate civilians."

"Kind of soft job they rejoice in. But I would fight the beggar any day. I often go to Macpherson's rooms and have a bout. You've never seen me at the foils."

"Must be a picture of beauty and grace," replied his friend, "but you won't be able to exhibit it on behalf of Miss Heimer. Let's get a move on. I must have some supper before the evening's out."

"I don't mind having a drink with you," said Raggleston.

"Your unparalleled kindness is only exceeded by your extraordinary capacity—come on."

And with that, the Englishman's word of introduction to all forms of activity, they left the room.

The Means to do Ill Deeds

It was Trinity term and full summer. The moon was coming up over the tree-tops of Lincoln's Inn fields and the green sward of the Inn's intra-mural spaces showed silvery against the heavy black shadows of the hall and library.

On such a night even the beadle's little sentry-box becomes a haunt of ancient peace, and that watcher by the crossways for the erring feet of the unlegal, can take the air by the immemorial lawns and reflect pharisaically on the public commons further west where the contact of poor humanity lends its savour to the very turf.

The two young men walked along the Strand, by the leagues of light and the roaring of the wheels, and crossing Trafalgar Square sought a grill-room where Lord Billinghurst made shift to supply the place of dinner which had been crowded out of his too busy day, and Raggleston revived the embers of the claret.

It was past ten when they issued upon Piccadilly—an off hour in that vicinity.

Droves of unoccupied hansoms jingled alongside at a foot pace, or stood in endless row along the narrow thoroughfare, their striped roof-awnings, and cushions in summer suits of brown hol-

land, offering allurement irrespective of destination; but our friends, pleased with their own virtue, walked soberly to the portals of Horsham House, whose court-yard lends retirement to the mansion, itself some hundred yards withdrawn from the gut of Piccadilly, that ever gurgling bottle-neck of the champagne of society. Its portico and porter's lodge, seen through railings of Sussex iron, face the street; its familiar side and too modern inhabitants it turns to the rustic obscurity of the Green Park.

The gathered blinds were drawn over the long windows, though not in particular acquiescence with the return of night, for Horsham House mostly shuts its eyes in the daytime, season or no season; but when a wing of the folding-doors had opened to them and they had crossed the dim hall supported on yellow marble columns interspaced with shrouded statuary—the Horsham marbles of the third Earl—and the footman had hung their hats on a grain-painted hat-stand contributed by the present Marquis, they found the back of the mansion awake and habitable; that wile of the penurious in uttermost Suburbia, which assumes a holiday in season if it have it

not, being well known, with a difference, to the poor of Belgravia, whence indeed it very likely sprang, along with other fashions and prejudices.

In the long library, which bore signs of being used for many purposes, books reared their gold and brown from floor to frieze; busts of departed statesmen a-top neatly marking off the tall cases which stood all round the room, only interrupted in their serviceable duty of supplanting a century of paint and paper, by the long windows starting from low window-seats and going up to the ceiling, and an immense chimney-piece in coloured marbles with heavy clusters of the eternal acanthus and vine collecting the London dirt and keeping it safe in deep crevices, inexpugnable by charwomen.

The Marquis's desk and chair, both piled with papers, shut out of sight full five hundred of the classics at the far end of the room. The English historians and a wilderness of 18th-century essayists were totally effaced by an unrolled estate map falling within a yard of the floor; at the fireplace end, and on the window side whence could be caught the quiver and gleam of the Piccadilly lamps, stood a small work-table in mar-

quetry and a cushioned Hamlet stool piled with volumes of recent birth—among so much barriered aristocracy the garish interlopers of a day.

Lord Billinghurst called for refreshments as in duty bound and rummaged for cigars, while Raggleston inspected the bookcases with no resentment whatever at their brass-wire fencing.

Moving round the room he espied on high over the fireplace, on the exiguous space afforded, a pair of rapiers.

"What are those foils?" he asked.

"They're not foils," replied Billinghurst, returning with a cigar in his mouth and proffering another. "They're the real thing—duelling swords."

"The *épée de combat*, eh? Ever been used?"

"Rather. There's a story about them. Gallant ancestor of mine—rather like you in disposition, I should imagine, who fancied himself at the small sword, picked a quarrel with a hapless stranger in the Green Park. A little knowledge of fencing was much the same as a little knowledge of boxing now. Makes a chap stand too stiffly to his rights. He never allows for the

casual stranger having any science and thinks he'll instruct him. It came off on this occasion though. They called in two passersby as seconds, to hold their coats, don't you know, and went at it, and my lusty progenitor downed his man and came galumphing back."

"How did he get the other man's sword?" asked Raggleston, who, mounted on a chair, was detaching both weapons from their nails.

"Took his purse, too, I shouldn't wonder," replied the ungenerous descendant. "No. As a matter of fact t'other man recovered, and they swore an eternal friendship. He was what they called a soldier of Fortune, which means that you fight for the pickings and not for the principle. He never left my silly old forbear until they'd emptied the cellar between them and eaten most of the estate."

"And one day he left his sword in the umbrella stand, I suppose," said Raggleston, delivering passes at the bookcase, a blade in either hand. "They're beautifully balanced. Rather small in the grip for me though." His point on the floor he bent the slender steel which sprang strongly from arc to arc under the pressure and threw

the light exultingly from side to hilt as he poised it, fore-shortened, towards the lamp. "Wonder what it feels like to pink a man with the button off." He stepped out into the middle of the room, clear of obstacles, and delivered at the door with great action.

"Over reach," said Billinghurst through his cigar. Raggleston recovered in denial, the door opened, and the footman announced:

"Freiherr von Deggendorf."

Lord Billinghurst gave a short laugh and removing his cigar advanced to meet him, while Raggelston moved up the room whistling low and swinging his blade.

The Freiherr had changed into evening clothes and recovered his equanimity in the process but he had not expected to find Raggleston at Horsham House and now paused in the doorway under an evident shock of returning emotion at the sight of the highly irregular trooper, steel in hand; and his glance followed him up the room instead of meeting Lord Billinghurst, who came forward to welcome him. He had schooled himself in the interval to fall in with the English neglect of rough speaking, but the sound of the

swords chimed with the fighting instinct still ringing distantly from the mannerless jostle at the Inn; and it leapt to meet what came upon him as an unlooked for compliance with his native idea.

But he turned to Lord Billinghurst and taking his hand, delivered his prepared civilities.

"Tomorrow I go, as I tell you, to the Isle of Wight. I return after one week to complete my dinners. So I would say goodbye for the present, and ask you please haf I right to do this?"

"It's all right about the term," answered his cicerone, leading him towards the glasses and cigars set out by the fireplace. "You have a fortnight yet; but it's all wrong about the lady. What's to become of my love's young dream, Raggleston's golden fancies, and all the rest of it?"

Raggleston had joined them, but the German ignored his presence, as he ignored Billinghurst's pleasantries.

"I thank you for your so kind information," he said. "I shall hope to see you on my return."

"And then it'll be all over but the shouting,

what?" said Lord Billinghurst, grinning at the third claimant.

Mr. Raggleston had laid his sword to rest, and, his hands in his pockets, now winked at his allied rival.

"Let's go to Cowes, Bill, and do a little yachting."

The German rounded on him in a flash.

"Do not gif yourself the trouble," he said; "I can gif Miss Heimer your sentiments and safe you the journey." He made the reference too obvious.

"By Jove, that's not playing the game, von Deggendorf!" exclaimed Billinghurst, shocked.

"If you repeat what you had no business to hear," said Raggleston, regarding his cigar, I would impress upon you—"

"Das geht nicht," shouted the German furiously, starting back. "You say in public before me—"

"Good Lord!" said Billinghurst, impatiently, "it was only a joke."

"And never mind what I said," pursued Raggleston, loweringly. "If you repeat it, my friend, there'll be trouble."

The German looked at him with contempt.

"I shall warn Miss Heimer that she does not well in receiving your acquaintance; and to you, Lord Billinghurst, I must say the same."

"You're too good," said Billinghurst, drily, but Raggleston put his cigar down on the table carefully.

"With your permission, Billinghurst, I am going to kick this chap," he said, and made one stride of it on the German, but Billinghurst was too quick for him and cast himself between them.

"Shut up," he said angrily. "You can't fight here."

"Das schickt sich nicht!" shouted the Freiherr, enraged beyond all control. "You will satisfy me. You have carried arms. You can fight; here are swords."

"Damn it, no!" laughed Lord Billinghurst, angrily, holding him back. "You're not in Germany."

"Das ist es gerade!" exclaimed the maddened German, waving his arms wildly and beyond translation of his utterances. "In England it is police affair. I must take the insult. I must take

the blow. *Stehen Sie auf!* Take a sword, and I will kill you; *mein Herr Raggleston. Sie sind ein gemeiner Kerl, Ein Feigling!*"

"It's got to come, Bill," said Raggleston, calmly. "I fight that chap somehow before he leaves the room. And it's only fair that he should have his chance, seeing that there are the proper articles on hand."

He crossed the long room, setting back a chair against the presses and picking up some fallen papers. The rapiers were lying on one of the half-way ledges of the bookcase beyond the door. He picked them up, and came back down the room with them ringing together in one hand.

"Don't be a lunatic, Raggles," protested Billinghurst. "I never saw such a jackass as you are when you get any liquor in you. Give them here."

But Raggleston avoided him, and gravely proffered the hilts to the Freiherr, who took one with alacrity and began, feeling familiar ground, to show to greater advantage; and Lord Billinghurst, always under the influence of his friend in the last event, and powerless with the German, felt his hold on the quarrel weakening and began

to fear mischief. But he stood between the points though the German was flinging off his cloak not to be backward in the encounter, and Raggleston's hand was running up his waistcoat buttons, his mouth showing the obstinate set that Billinghurst knew only too well.

"Lord Billinghurst, you will be my second?" inquired the Baron courteously, but as taking it for granted.

"But Raggleston can't fight without a second," objected Lord Billinghurst, catching at the difficulty.

"Never mind me. I'll make a hole in him with no one to help me," said Raggleston, with Britannic assurance and broad disregard of the courtesies of the field.

"Mind you don't get one drilled in your own carcass," replied Billinghurst, vexed and undecided. "They're not foils, you know. For God's sake, don't be an ass, Jack!"

"Herr Raggleston should have a second," affirmed von Deggendorf, collected again under the touch of the old harness.

"Then you can't fight," said Billinghurst decidedly, "besides—"

"I have it," said Raggleston, "the passer-by again—and likely as not he'll be a German nowadays."

"Do you think it rains lunatics in Arlington Street?" asked Billinghurst; but the notion held a good prospect of interruption, if not of interference. He might hale in some decent looking Johnny, he thought, and make this foolishness impossible. The humour of the thing took him too. To accost some sober stranger passing the portals with a request couched in the stateliest terms that he should enter and arbitrate upon a point of honour which was threatening instant bloodshed.

The hour was late; the theatres should be out; and it was not far outside probabilities that he should come upon some man he knew walking between his clubs on a summer night in the season.

"I will endeavor to get you a second, Herr von Deggendorf," he said, beginning to feel his part. "If you and Mr. Raggleston will drop your swords and accompany me to the courtyard I may find a gentleman who will be disposed to help us in this very pretty quarrel."

The German bowed acquiescence, doubting nothing, and Lord Billinghurst, paying no heed to Raggleston's "Better have the butler in," led across the hall and down the steps to the side gateway which stood open by the untenanted porter's lodge.

Leaving the other two behind him standing sulkily aloof from each other in the shadowed courtyard, the young nobleman stepped on to the pavement of the street, laughing and swearing under his breath, and stood bare-headed in the warm night.

The street was empty of foot-passengers, but towards its issue upon Piccadilly, whence the lights and stamping of the traffic disturbed its backwaters, a crawling hansom reined in and turned with a clatter and bore down upon him with waving whip and rocking lights, expectant of a fare.

He shook his head and waved the man past, who turned disappointed down Bennett street, but as the red lights dropped away at a jingling walk a footfall came from the St. James's Street end of the short turning, and a young man presently emerged upon Arlington Street, walking at

a measured pace, hat in hand, as taking advantage of the short interval of obscurity to enjoy the night, while under his long open covert coat his shirt-fronted bosom also met the cool air. He was tall and slight and clean-shaven, with a well marked nose, and his look met Lord Billinghurst's searching and curious scrutiny with well bred impassivity.

"Now, if I can strike the right note I believe I shall get the response," was his lordship's thought. "Here goes!" he said, half aloud, and stepped into the lamplight.

CHAPTER III.

A STROLLING PLAYER

A CROWDED train slackened its steady rush alongside the platform of Surwood station, its roaring breath panting against the glass span, and the long expectant crowd, as if drawn into its swirl, surged and stumbled in the direction of its passage. Divided parties hanging on to different door handles uttered loud rallying cries and immediately forsook their hold for the loudly advertised openings discovered simultaneously by the opposite factions, while individual travellers of single and selfish intention slipped into the vacancies. Carriages, voiding their contents, shot out nimble clerks from bursten doors, then families following thick in strings, and finally exuded their dregs, dragging slow with bags and

parcels, through the inrush of the new freight. "Victoria train," shouted the guards, "third class forward—plenty of room in front, ma'am," and the porters' juggernaut trollies rumbled through all resistance.

Backing against the closed bookstall, close to a tall young man who was fending off the shouldering crowd, stood Miss Mary Vane. As tall as her companion, upright, rosy and resolute, in a big black hat and a caped cloak with inside pockets in which her hands were thrust, she eyed the tumult with the good humoured toleration of the self-reliant, or at least of the disinterested. Her neighbor, too, showed no sign of traveling fever, his features being unmarked by worry, or, more singularly, considering his years, by vacuity or boredom. His detachment of expression was to be noticed when he looked at the quite imposing young lady by his side, for though admiration was not absent, it was the dispassionate admiration that knows perfection still to seek. A working man with an interminable family at length emptied a carriage opposite the bookstall, gently urging and lifting all sizes of children to the platform with cautious "mind 'ow you fall," or

"don't lose mother"; and Miss Vane nodded her big hat at the vacant compartment.

"Well, Mr. Arden, you had better get your seat," she said, "or you will be left out in the cold." Arden moved towards the open door and let down the window.

"Good-night, Miss Vane," he said, shaking hands; "but why in the world you should see me off I don't know. It is a most improper reversal of things."

She laughed and shut the door upon him.

"I live across the road, you see, and we actors and actresses," they both laughed, "are not like other people. Dress rehearsal next Tuesday, don't forget. Good night, Mr. Arden. My love to your sister."

The train moved off; Arden, standing at the window, acknowledging a wave of the hand from the unfettered Miss Vane ere she turned her straight young back. A brick wall twelve inches away next appearing, he sat down and consulted a pocket time-table. The train promised to fulfill its obligations at 10:37, with all the ridiculous particularity of an untrustworthy debtor. "Say a quarter to eleven," he reflected, "I dare say I

shall have time to make a cast round by the club." He lit a cigarette, screwed it into a holder, and sat back enjoying with half closed eyes the strong breeze through the window, and, taking stoically the bombardment of small cinders, abandoned his mind to the events of the evening and, incidentally, to Miss Vane.

Paul Arden was arrived at that point in his young fortunes when the cold advice of elders urges the doing of a categorical something; but when the ungathered and undirected springs of individualism greatly prefer the vague nothing. Which, unsatisfying as even he could feel it to be, is at least uncommitted to the wrong path. Choose; choose quickly; said the holders of the purse-strings; and be grateful that choice is open to you. And they held out the short, dry lists of the professions or the small squared pigeonholes of business. "Ah! let me wait a little!" he would have cried. "Must our lives depend on these things?" The subjective temperament, so slow to shape itself into character, was in him not long freed from boyhood, and he was loth to abandon his new found liberty of dreams. He had been glad to leave the grub stage only enjoya-

ble by the unconscious grub, and after some years of almost butterfly existence, initiated by an illness, was still disinclined to adopt the ways of more industrious creatures. His sister's fondness working upon his father's indulgence had hitherto tided over the occasions of threatened coercion, and during his father's long absences in America, where his business branch took him for half the year, he appreciated very fully the forbearance he found so regrettably marred by hard words when the head of the publishing house of Arden and Arden was established in home quarters.

Paul, a fastidious and fantastic person, of fine feeling though unemotional, with wide sympathy though with little *cameraderie,* made his sister his chief friend, and if as confidante she could not go all the way, his reticence was but due to the wiser pruning or more regular growth of her less rambling fancy.

Not easily ruffled, he was patient of his father's impatience and amenable in manner to his sister's remonstrances, though truly they were much softened in the echo.

"Paul is always open to argument," had pleaded his sister on one occasion to Mr. Arden.

"What we are considering, my dear Daisy," Mr. Arden had replied, "is what is open to Paul. At present a good offer. Eventually, I fear, the street."

Then Daisy would try her hand on her brother.

"Father says that when he was your age—"

"My dear Daisy, I cannot possibly allow that my father knew better than I when he was my age. Unless each generation advanced in wisdom we should still be trephining with stone axes."

"When you're as old as father you'll know better—"

"Yes. Better than father."

"I do not mean that—"

"No. Nor does he. But it is true. The wisdom of the ancients, my dear Daisy," Paul would inform his sister across the tea table, "was but the folly of the children. They lived when the world was young. There was no experience to draw on. They had to make it. We are thousands of years older and ever so much wiser."

"But, my dear boy, how are you going to live?

Perhaps you know that, since you are so wise. You know what father wrote from Boston last time? I would spare you the unpleasant reminder—"

"I have seen his name on documents I liked better," said the son without resentment, "but how unselfish you are. Whom would you lean on and I away? You would lop off the limb on which you sit."

"Sit on you? I wish I could; you—limb."

"Daisy, where do you learn such language? I am sure you don't get it from me—"

And the lecture would end with a laugh. Although she stood between father and son, she had no intention, as she ofttimes remarked, of being a mere buffer. Paul deprecated the expression and took her reproofs in excellent part. He was the best of brothers and Daisy was always ready to acknowledge it, but she need not have acknowledged it to him. He knew it. And if Mr. Arden were away the brother and sister would continue to live their life, Daisy, sole mistress of the household since her fourteenth year, managing with a practised hand, and receiving with imperturbed grace those who came on the foot-

ing of friends and those who had the advantage of relationship. But Paul fought shy of some of his kin. No one can be born into an intimacy, he would say, and aunts of a zealous affection would inquire for him in vain. But when Daisy wanted conduct to party or park she could rely on her man.

Among a thousand acquaintanceships scraped in queerly assorted book companies had been that of Lord Chesterfield; and not suspecting perhaps his sister's exercise of a kindred but transformed tutelage, he had tried eagerly and amusedly to ape the ideal of that philosophy; finding in the practice of social artificialities the pleasure of an actor studying postures, and a satisfaction in the results which had been denied him had a less fanciful aptitude imbued the lessons with a seriousness to overweight them.

Daisy was proud of her brother's progress, perhaps justly, as we have hinted, but fortunately for his good conceit of himself, a baneful weed but useful in small quantities, he attributed it to his own efforts. He and his sister did not lack invitations, though the doors of the big house in Collingham Gardens since Mr. Arden's

widowhood, and of late years by reason of his long absences from England, were not often thrown wide.

On a hot night in the season, when the quickened pulses of the town could be felt to its far west, they would sit on the awned balcony of Daisy's room, Paul smoking cigarettes and quoting all the scamps in literature from Autolycus to Harold Skimpole as he paraded his notions on life out of office, Daisy lending half her attention to the outer commotion and overflow of some party near at hand. Next door perhaps an awning ran down to the pavement's edge, and the shining tops of footmen's hats dodged in its shelter, moving outwards when a gathered train or lace-covered head slipped from a halted carriage. Voices came up on the night, and the sharp slam of carriage doors, and the jingling of bit and harness as horses pacing or standing under the gaslamps tossed their impatient heads. The rhythm of a string band beat stirringly and low over the gardens.

"When I have a house of my own—"

"You have a house of your own."

"Well, in a way. And a family, too, as long as I have you on my hands."

"What do you propose to do with me?"

"I don't know. You are very difficult. I can't marry you off when you have no prospects."

"But you are a simply wretched matchmaker. You must find me matrimonial prospects."

"If ever you marry for money, Paul, I—I—won't call on you."

"And if I marry a girl without any, our only caller will be the tax collector. No. You may marry if you like, but I think you could hardly be better off."

"And my house would be another caravanserai for you."

"Well, of course, he would be a friend of mine. All good sisters marry their brothers' friends."

"Then you had better make some. Yours are impossible."

"I'll find you a husband in my own good time. I don't want you married just yet."

"Mary Vane would make a good man, though—"

"Daisy! You envy her her inches."

Miss Arden stretched a scornful neck.

"I want to play while I'm young and can," pursued Paul. "I must be out in the morning. I can't wait till evening. I want to live."

"But you don't live. You only look on."

"That's the way to see the game. The stalls are the best part of a playhouse."

"Then why are you acting with the Vanes?"

"You are so literal, Daisy. Of the amateur stage I am too tender-hearted to be a spectator. Act there—ruthlessly—or avoid the spot. No, girl! I speak of a Larger Stage."

"You had better listen to this waltz."

"The glamour of the stage, that green sickness of girls, has its larger counterpart. What drives the youth of nations to struggle in the wake of its public men? To ape Parliament in debating societies? To take commissions in the militia? To hold receptions in Earl's Court?" He waved his cigarette towards the canopied footway below. "The rankest amateurism. They are stage-struck. I don't fall into the vulgar error and uselessly decry that living process called snobbery. That is an inevitable and beneficial factor in evolution. There is no standing still in the social state. But all these good peo-

ple voluntarily supering and mobbing the stage-doors of society are but theatrical aspirants like those whose portraits fill papers to distract one's pained attention in a dentist's waiting-room. For me, a philosopher, my dear Daisy, the desire for 'a clear stage and a crowd to see' is merely an actor's vanity."

"And what has all this to do with bread and butter?"

"Go on cutting it, my dear Daisy, like a well-conducted person."

And as things stood Daisy went on cutting it, Mr. Arden providing it, and Paul eating it. And jam therewith when he could get it. For even theories have to be fed, though Mr. Arden might well have replied that he did not see the necessity.

A love of adventure and of the shifting scene outstripped the prosaic preliminaries of the most active career, as his passion for acting a part transcended the sordid actualities and properties of the boards, and made him deplore the confinement of so fine an art to the narrow bounds of a theatre. Though one thing needful he found

on the mimic stage, and that was the disguise—the outer man of his assumption.

Not caring a button for his audience, he acted to his company, and was never known to say that it would be all right on the night. So he shone among amateurs, and in the present month of grace, through the eyeglass and behind the moustache of Lord Beauclerk in the "Triple Thread" he had weakened the defences of Miss Molly Vane, all too thinly disguised in mere milkmaid costume, with wig like Ossa piled, and colour in wasteful and ridiculous excess. Miss Molly Vane still she was unconscientiously, but unconscious of her rival the milkmaid, and all too susceptible of the admirably delivered blandishments of Lord Beauclerk, who had no existence in her sphere of being: a mere two-dimensional thing, as any onlooker could have told her —an animated picture framed in a proscenium. Whereas, Lord Beauclerk, artistically impatient of the too frequent obstrusion of Miss Vane, with difficulty wooed and followed a deficient abstraction with the name and little else of Dolly Dimples.

The Surwood theatricals were in active prepa-

ration, the centre of activities, pending production, being the Vanes' house. The performance itself was not too imminent, being in fact a fortnight off, but Paul had insisted on early rehearsals in force. This was Monday night. Paul, as he sat in the train, with the brim of his hat balanced on his cigarette-holder, thought that there was yet time to make something of it. Thought too of Molly. She was a handsome girl. He admired her, he admitted. Off the stage. On the stage he admired Lord Beauclerk to the exclusion of all others.

There again was a touch of the constant irritation.

Off the stage, but still Lord Beauclerk, he could have seen his way with Molly. But off the stage he was Paul Arden, reserved, rather vain, intensely fearful of a false step towards intimacy. But he was conscious that he could have improved his relations with any man or woman could he but dress the part. But that he could only do on a silly stage twelve feet square.

He pitched his cigarette out of the window, moved across to the opposite seat, out of the draught, and feeling gingerly in his waistcoat

pocket, produced from folds of soft paper a silky moustache, of Clarkson's best. Lord Beauclerk's. Also a gold-rimmed eye-glass with a segment of another and inner rim for the benefit of the amateur eye—which does not use a glass for business. This, too, was the property of the intriguing nobleman. Lovingly he handled them. There was no looking-glass in his carriage, so, after abstractedly cocking the monocle for some minutes, he laid away both with soft regret and sat frowning into the darkness without.

They were running into Grosvenor Road and alternate trains were being pushed up the narrow way in short moves, overhauling and dropping one another by half lengths, the faces at the lighted windows showing a smug superiority of open exultation when their own engine forged ahead, or injured pride and open execration when it fell behind. The ticket collectors kept the bridge bravely, but it was crossed at last. Paul Arden, finding that he was late, as he had expected to be, thought he might as well be later, and turned his steps to St. James's. Daisy had given him an evening off; she was alone, it was true, but by now she was in bed and enjoying

her beauty sleep, and he was in no hurry to be home.

Up Grosvenor Place, by the confines of the Palace garden, he walked rapidly, inhaling the contagion that charged the warm darkness; pressing on to where the town keeps open house night after night, its flambeaux flaring high, its guests hurrying to the quickening of its music, its deleterious supper-wines flowing in streams; its reckonings deferred till the morning.

Every flagstone is a spring-board at one-and-twenty; every curb a jumping-off point to fortune. Every lighted doorway an invitation; every flat-trap an adventure. A bar acquaintance is a boon companion; a pretty face an emprise. The roaring of the glittering roads plays a big drum accompaniment to the strain he hums through smiling lips; any company is mirth, a shouted catch is music, a band is madness. Any liquor serves his turn, any man may be his friend; and every friend must have his share. There is no bottom to his pocket, or if it be reached—why, someone else must stand! But that is part of the awakening, and has nothing to do with One-and twenty, at present making

his way along the shilling side of Piccadilly, tolerably well aware of the deceptive pulses in his blood, and presently turning down St. James's Street to portals where no "child of sin" takes him "by the curls," but a commissionaire opens to him and a yawning hall-porter, noting him as the advance guard of the young brigade, connoting the retreat of the veterans, delegates his office to an inferior functionary, and departs bedward to Brook-Green.

Paul stood undecided in the lobby. He read the telegrams, considered the theatre-bills, inspected the tape-machine, measured the patterned floor-tiles with slow steps; but the town was calling, and the great swing-doors let in the unrest of the night instead of shutting it resolutely out with the established lock, bolt, and chain, of private virtuous domesticity. He should have gone home, he told himself.

Then go, said Mentor.

Now you are this far West, said the Night.

You'll be sorry in the morning, said Mentor.

The sovereigns jingled in his pocket as he worked his heel into the mat.

There'll be none to jingle tomorrow, said Mentor.

What are they for? asked the Night.

A shrewd appeal. No stronger claim would appear at that hour.

Hang it! man, have some sense, urged Mentor.

Hang it! man, have some fun, mocked the Night, breathing balmily through the doorway.

His hands in his pockets, he paced the patterned tiles with carefully adjusted steps, but when he reached the door again at the end of his string of diagonals, Mentor pushed him suddenly off his balance and walked him out and round the corner homewards.

This is a tame ending, protested One-and-twenty. But he was a decent fellow and at bottom never thought of sulking. In much the same manner he had often found himself involuntarily shot out of bed in the morning after long interior wrestling. "The springs of conscience," he supposed, walking up Bennet Street. "You can coil 'em and sit on them for a time... It was a near thing, though," and he fanned himself with his hat.

The night was very hot and still and the stars twinkled benignantly on him as he held his bared head high and turned his neck in his collar. He gazed benignly back.

"One forgets about the stars among all these gaslamps," he muttered to himself, looking round him again.

On crossing the roadway to the west side of Arlington Street he noticed a man standing on the opposite pavement looking at him with more than ordinary scrutiny. As Paul returned his gaze he even stepped forward a pace as if to get a better sight, and now showed himself as a youth of about his own age, fair to sandy, of a cheerful and engaging countenance, and the perplexity and hesitation which showed in it had, he thought, a humorous cast. A dark blue blazer with some college crest on the pocket had relieved a frock coat from duty, and he was nervously chewing the stump of a cigar as he bent his puckered brows on the comer. The gateway of a great house yawned black behind him. Through the railings of its forecourt Paul caught a glimpse of white moving to and fro, and a little removed from it the fiery spark of

another smoker. He pursued his way across the road whilst he made these observations and was glancing from the young man in the blazer to the house behind him, wondering idly who the occupiers might be, when the young man took his hands from his pockets, threw down his cigar, and stepped into the road and stopped him.

CHAPTER IV

ARBITRATION

"FORGIVE me for stopping you, and I will explain the reason," he said, "but I must ask for a minute's patience, if that is not asking too much." He spoke clearly and pleasantly, but there was a suggestion of desperation in his coolness. He was, plainly, watching for a rebuff as a boxer watches for a blow. But Paul liked the look of him. Patient of incident he thought that this might yield interest.

"My time is yours," he said magnificently.

The young man in the blazer took courage.

"I am in a—difficulty," he said. His eye twinkled. He had nearly said "fix." "I want help." He watched narrowly for the counter. "I have an adventure to propose to you."

"An adventure!" cried Paul. "I have been looking for you for years. I am entirely at your service."

The other appeared wonderfully brisked at this.

"I thought you were the man for me!" he cried. "I have fallen on my feet." He looked round him. There was no one in the street but themselves. In the court-yard behind him the red spark glowed angrily, and a little removed from it a patch of white moved to and fro in the darkness.

"I must introduce myself," he said, "for I must afterwards introduce you—with your permission. My name is Billinghurst—Lord Billinghurst."

"I remember now," thought Arden to himself, looking at the house again. "Then this is Horsham House?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes. Lord Horsham is my father."

Paul thought he detected a shade of apology. Lord Horsham had not been a popular minister. It might well be an annoyance to a son.

"My name is Arden," he hastened to say.

"Well, Mr. Arden," said Lord Billinghurst,

showing more confidence, "the plot is simply this. I have two fellows in here who are bent on fighting a duel."

Arden could hardly believe in his good fortune.

"One of them," continued Lord Billinghurst, "is a great friend of mine, and I know him too well to hope to stop him. The other is a foreigner—a German, whom I don't know at all. But he seems to think it the most natural thing in the world and marked me down for his bottle-holder on the spot. They're both as hot as mustard, thirsting for gore, and the devil of it is that they are already sword in hand.

Arden whistled with surprise.

"Things have gone far, then. I should be afraid that the German would be the better man at that game."

Lord Billinghurst nodded. A confidential nod.

"Perhaps you will say that I should have asked them to settle their differences outside, or that I should have sent for a policeman. I could do either now, and must do so if you decline to make up the rubber; but at the moment they

were at each other's throat. Then, again, Raggleston—my man—was in the wrong of it, and if I get a policeman to save him from the German he would never forgive me. He rather fancies himself, unfortunately, and I was to engage you as his second, but of course I want you to come in and pooh-pooh the whole concern. We must stop it, you know. I could make no head against them myself, and besides—" his hands thrust in his pockets he considered the pavement between his straddled feet; then looking at Arden again with his former perplexity, "I am mixed up in it myself," he said.

Paul Arden put his hands behind him and rested his weight comfortably on his stick.

"And who is the lady?" he asked.

Lord Billinghurst wavered no longer.

"Come on," said he, and taking his man by the arm led him into the court-yard and across it to the doors of the house. The two wandering figures in the yard closed in on them and followed them up the steps and into the hall, where Lord Billinghurst waited for them and closed the doors behind them, and Arden found himself confronted with the conspirators against the

peace—one tall, blond, Teutonic, rather puffy about the eyes, and rigid in his "*frac*" as a foreigner may be with whom it implies an occasion; the other dark, but very English, hard and healthy looking and very much at ease in worn blue serge. Lord Billinghurst introduced them with a gravity to suit their feelings, and led across the hall to the library beyond, where the bright lights seemed brilliant after their sojourn in the darkness; and where Arden's eyes fell at once on a pair of swords standing on their points against the middle window. The room was cleared for action, but Lord Billinghurst's first move was to lift into the middle of it a small table set with decanters and glasses, and to offer refreshment to the newcomer.

He drew chairs forward and called on every one to sit down. Raggleston did so under protest, and thereafter the German.

"Gentlemen," said Lord Billinghurst, "I propose that Mr. Arden, who so handsomely lends us his time and his services, shall arbitrate between us in this affair."

"Hullo!" said Raggleston to Arden, "I thought you were going to give me a knee."

"I am at Lord Billinghurst's disposition," replied Arden, drinking his whisky-and-soda and prepared to enjoy himself.

The Baron said nothing, but it promised no consent. Lord Billinghurst continued, addressing himself to Raggleston and the German.

"You must remember that I have a voice in this quarrel. If you two fellows fight, the winner will probably think himself entitled to a free hand. Then where do I come in?"

"Perhaps as chief mourner," suggested Raggleston, modestly.

"No. Your difference with Herr von Deggendorf is a side issue. Let us submit the whole story to Mr. Arden, who shall appoint the order of our—wooing—for that, I take it, is to go to the root of the matter; and let us engage ourselves to abide by his decision."

The Freiherr looked unconvinced. "Herr Raggleston has insulted me," he said, "and also —" Miss Heimer had not been mentioned before Arden, so he stopped short.

"Look here, von Deggendorf, the three of us can't fight. Yet I should have a voice in the settlement. Let me put the case before Mr. Ar-

den, who is a stranger to us all. If he decides that you shall have the first try, Raggleston and I will stand aside, and you shall go alone to the Isle of Wight."

"But if Mr. Arden decide in favor of Herr Raggleston?" asked the Freiherr, smiling ironically.

"What Mr. Arden's judgment may be, I know even less than himself," replied Billinghurst, stiffly, sitting back in his chair, "but I am ready to abide it."

Raggleston had been talking to Arden. "After all, it's rather rough on the house," he finished by saying, "and if the Baron will submit I will pledge myself."

"Then be it so," cried Lord Billinghurst, carrying it with a high hand. "Mr. Arden, as you divined, there is a lady in the case. Herr von Deggendorf, Mr. Raggleston, and myself, are all —interested in—I think you are entitled to know all we can tell you—a certain Miss Heimer. Mr. Raggleston and Herr von Deggendorf are so warm in their devotion—though I would not seem to depreciate my own—that they have fallen out about her. But I think that the favour of

an open field accorded to each in turn should arrange our jealousies—if not amicably, without fear of collision. If you can judge of our deserts as you see us, and despatch us in due precedence upon this quest, we agree to abide by the result."

"And I'll ask you to the wedding," said Raggleston.

The Freiherr shrugged his shoulders and probably made a mental reservation, but no open refusal. They waited for Arden to speak. The arbiter asked for a cigarette, and considered his judgment, and presently was inspired.

"Gentlemen," he asked, rising to his legs, "should I not be presented to Miss Heimer?"

"Ungehört," said the German under his breath.

Raggleston hummed. "Oh, yes, he is a judge, and a good judge too," but Lord Billinghurst said instantly, "With all my heart, but we can't get at her."

Arden continued: "I am asked to choose at short notice, and I may say blindfold, a husband for a lady I have never seen. If the element of that lady's affections may not be entered in my

reckonings, but must be reserved for her own and final sentence, how can I handicap competitors whose respective favour in her sight is to me an unknown quantity? He to whom I give a week's start may already have a lead in opportunity, and he whom I keep to scratch may already be handicapped by unkind Fortune."

"It is the same for all," said Lord Billinghurst.

"And as for the fortune," said Raggleston, brutally, "it's what we're running for."

"Das ist gar nicht so," cried the Freiherr, struggling to his legs. Herr Raggleston must for himself speak. I care not that the Fraulein is rich. *Bin nicht von Ihrer meinung—abscheulich—unverschämt!"* He pounded the table with his fist.

"At any rate, Mr. Arden," put in Lord Billinghurst hastily, "I may say that none of us has any advantage that way. Miss Heimer's fortune puts her beyond the influence of anything we can offer."

Raggleston shouted with laughter. "Your health, Bill," he said, drinking to him. "I consider that remark a gem—beyond the influence of anything we can offer—Mr. Arden, you may

unhesitatingly accept Lord Billinghurst's assurance." He roared till the glasses rang.

"Stop your infernal row," growled Billinghurst, "or I won't lend you your railway fare."

Raggleston wiped his eyes. "Then Mr. Arden must, if he sends me on this quest for a bride," he said.

The Freiherr looked scandalized and astonished. He began to suspect what Arden had not been slow to discover, that Raggleston's pursuit, at any rate, of the lady fair, rose rather from the spirit of opposition than from any more serious sentiment. Levity of manner might be but lack of good taste. But he was not clear. Raggleston had been ready enough to fight half an hour since.

He was swaying with laughter now; he had forgotten all about the duel and almost about the German. Billinghurst, well pleased at his change of humour, sat yet by the table, amused at Arden's bearing and hoping devoutly that he would find a way out of the squabble for them, or, at worst, out of the house.

"Well, Mr. Arden," he said, "you have now something to go on. You know the nature of

our affections, and the state of our fortunes. Our natural advantages we leave to your intuition. Have another drink and then tell us what you think of us. One finger only? Well, you know best."

Paul Arden rapidly considered the situation, the spirit of mischief working in him. To placate the German would, in most likelihood, promote the peace, but he did not feel moved to serve the German. To give Raggleston the first look-in would do little harm to any one else's prospects, for he was plainly a man who only asked sufficient rope. It seemed best to send Billinghurst. But he might not like it, as the scheme had been his. He would send Raggleston and see how the German took it.

"Well, then, gentlemen," he said aloud, backing a few steps down the room and facing the trio, "here is my judgment. The rules being that each competitor for the prize, the rich prize, of this lady's person, shall, in the order I allot, have a free hand and an open field to urge his suit until accepted or rejected; and immediately on the happening of such acceptance or rejection, or in the event of his abandoning his pur-

pose, that he shall communicate with his next to follow."

His audience acquiescing, though the German bit his nails and looked worried, he continued in a louder voice:

"In view of the fact that Mr. Raggleston is (like myself) a commoner and yet without the wealth a commoner in such case should have to weigh against the coronet's ruddy gold—" ("a ruddy aristocracy," Mr. Raggleston was understood to murmur), "and furthermore, in view of his confession that his pretension to Miss Heimer's hand is not backed by that heartfelt affection that animates at least one of his rivals, I cannot but account him at a disadvantage. In short, I really do not see what he can say for himself."

Applause and approval from Mr. Raggleston's rivals.

"I must therefore give him a good start. And I accord him the first try."

Laughter and cheers from Mr. Raggleston.

"Herr von Deggendorf, who is, I understand, a compatriot of Miss Heimer's by blood, if not

by adoption, has the advantage of the type of beauty most likely to appeal."

Herr von Deggendorf stroked his moustache. His rivals hung their heads. "He can make the lady of his choice Frau Baronin, or Freifrau—he must forgive my ignorance—so Lord Billinghurst's coronet pales to a mere equality. He can also, as we have heard, assure her that he loves her for herself alone. With these overwhelming aids to grace the Freiherr von Deggendorf must start scratch, and will, I trust, acknowledge the justice of his position. Lord Billinghurst then falls into the second place in the adventure, and it is to him that the quest will pass when Mr. Raggleston communicates the tidings of his success or failure. I have done my best for you, gentlemen, and now I can but drink to the best man."

"Then here's to you again, Bill," said Raggleston, throwing back his head; "you won't refuse me that office."

"You overlooked Mr. Raggleston's confidence in your reckoning, Mr. Arden," said Lord Billinghurst, "and it should take him far. Charge

your glasses, gentlemen. I give you Mr. Arden."

The soda-water corks flew left and right and the company drank to Arden, their noble selves, to Miss Heimer, and to the quest, until the glasses were dry, and Arden rose to go.

"I shall look for you this day week and at the same hour," said Lord Billinghurst, "and shall hope to give you news—before I leave for the country. You must turn up too, von Deggendorf."

"Yes. I shall probably be back," said the Freiherr.

"Back. Where from?" said Lord Billinghurst, staring.

"From the Insel Wight, *nicht wahr,*" said the Freiherr placidly.

There was silence.

"I haf told you, *nicht wahr,* I go to see Miss Heimer tomorrow?"

Raggleston positively staggered. "Hasn't the beggar understood?" he cried. Lord Billinghurst backed against the door.

"My dear von Deggendorf," he said, "haven't you understood? The matter is arranged for

us. Mr. Raggleston goes to the Isle of Wight tomorrow, and you and I are pledged not to interfere." He spoke very gently and his tone contrasted with the other's consequent outburst.

"Unsinn!" shouted the German suddenly, snapping his tension. "You think me one child. You think I leave the Fraulein to this. I dell you no! Donnerwetter, no!" His face was suffused with anger. "Enough of this childishness. *Quatsch!* Go to your games, *verdamte Buben!* Pink-ponk is for you, not women—you who cannot fight." The perspiration shone on his cheeks. He stamped his fist into his palm. "I leaf you now, but I will gif news of you. You need not visit the Fraulein more."

"I am afraid we shall have to go back to the beginning, Jack," said Lord Billinghurst, regretfully.

"Much better," assented Raggleston with approval. "It might have been all over by now. Of course, if you like, I'll help him across the hall and down the steps, but we should have to deal with him afterwards. And it is my show now. You have nothing to do with it until you hear of 'my success or failure,'" he quoted.

"And if you fail?" asked Billinghurst, troubled.

"And I would call your attention to the fact that he called me Dutch names. I heard him. I really behaved like a lamb, Bill. I appeal to you, Mr Arden. Fail!" he added, contemptuously. "Lord bless you, I was brought up on soft food."

"I had rather you enforced the judgment of the court than I did," said Arden, contemplating the wrathful German, who was looking from one to the other, only gathering breath to break out again. "But I think that whatever arbitrament you may now decide on"—and for the life of him he could not keep his eye from the swords—"the—er—point of it should be impressed upon Herr von Deggendorf beyond misconception."

Raggleston grinned savagely and looked at Billinghurst, who thrust out his under lip. "I am sorry to have troubled you for nothing—" he began.

"If I may play the part originally intended for me—" said Arden, spreading his hands.

The Freiherr stood panting, almost smoking. He was so far from being attuned to their low

pitch that their drift positively escaped him. Swelling with contempt, he thought the opposition ended and began the formation of some condescending words of farewell. Billinghurst looked disgusted. Raggleston more than hopeful—decided. He began to put back the chairs. The young host snapped his fingers in a despairing gesture and turned to Arden.

"I accept your offer, with a difference. Take over this d—d fellow, do you mind—and I'll look after Jack. I suppose you know, Mr. Arden," he went on in an undertone, "that this may be a serious business for us? If you like to go quietly home no one could reproach you."

"—But myself," said Arden, following the best models and highly pleased with the imitation. "I will second Herr von Deggendorf, and let us hope that he may be eliminated from the quest. After all, if your friend fancies himself—"

"I begin to think that you are the worst lunatic of the lot," said Billinghurst with a sigh. "All Bedlam's loose tonight. But since we are seconding this madness let us arrange things for the best." He first begged the Freiherr with

great politeness to reserve his fire for a moment while he consulted with his friends. Raggleston he requested to desist from clearing a ring, hastily adding that it was the business of the seconds. Whereon Mr. Raggleston with alacritous amiability sat down and compounded himself a short drink out of the drains of the bottles. Then returning to Arden he told him his idea.

"I have been thinking that the garden outside these windows has a gate onto the Park—"

"Excellent," agreed Arden, "it's a magnificent night, and the light will be less baulky there than here."

"Devilish bad, though," said Billinghurst. "Can't we turn them loose among the trees and let them look for one another in the fashion of the American backwoods?"

"What, with shot guns? A shot would bring all Piccadilly down on us."

"True. And they might bag one of us by accident—"

"Let them use the swords. It's much safer—for us and for them. All the distinguished duellists are swordsmen. Th that take to pistols

shall perish by the pistol—before they arrive at distinction."

"You think there's not much danger, then, of serious hurt?" asked Billinghurst, willing to believe it the stranger's fund of experience.

"No, I don't. We can stop them at the first scratch."

"Then hadn't they better fight where we can see?"

"So long as they can feel—"

"What? for one another!"

"There's a full moon."

"You can hardly deny that it's lighter in here."

But Arden was bitten with the notion of a duel by moonlight, and urged the awkward shape of the room and the difficulty of placing the lamps.

"All right," said Billinghurst, "you instruct your man and I'll just ring and tell them to shut up the house. If they're not gone to bed already." But a footman came to the bell and when dismissed hesitated.

"The Marquis—" he began.

"What's that?" asked Billinghurst, sharply.

"—comes back tonight, your lordship."

"Nonsense," said Billinghurst, nervously irritated.

"Mrs. Rudd had a postcard this evening, your lordship."

This was convincing.

"Blazes!" exclaimed his lordship with vehemence. The conspirators gazed fearfully on one another. "Never mind," he said, "I'll sit up for him. He won't want anything. You can go to bed." The footman retired and Billinghurst studied the clock.

"It's now ten minutes to twelve," he said. "I know the train. He can't be here till half-past. But there's no time to waste."

Arden addressed himself to his man and explained to him that since he had rejected the umpire's decision Mr. Raggleston was ready to give him satisfaction in his own way. And that he, Arden, was ready to do the necessary for him. They bowed to one another, and exchanged assurances of their distinguished consideration, and at the Freiherr's request Arden presented him with his card. "Your names are hard for me," said the Freiherr, smiling. "But I would wish to remember him." Billinghurst, after some hunt-

ing, had found the key of the gate and having extinguished all the lamps but one now stood at the open window whence Raggleston had already passed out. "Will you bring the swords, Mr. Arden?" he said. Arden put the weapons under his arm and followed the Freiherr through the window.

CHAPTER V

ARMS

THE small stretch of gravel edged with bedded geraniums, between the steps under the library window and the heavy railing at the Park side, lay alarmingly close to the stir of Piccadilly; and the footfalls and the voices of the passersby on the near side of the road, and the stare of the gas lamps at its pavement's edge, moved Arden to bring the swords under his coat and to pull his coat-collar up to his hat-brim.

He glanced behind and above him at the windows of the house.

All were dark save those of the room they had left, and there the solitary lamp behind the one shuttered window let little and indirect illumination through the two standing open.

But Piccadilly was not thinking of them. The rust shrieked in the gate lock, and the four of them stood silently for a minute, Billinghurst with his neck craned over the spikes, before they issued gently upon the dry path, flecked with shadows, which led southwards into obscurity. The last man out closed the gate gingerly, and they stepped across into the black shelter of the trees.

Raggleston turned to Arden.

"Don't show any white," he said.

Arden was closed wrapped but he guessed the application of the advice, and motioned the German to pull his coat across his shirt-front which shone in the moonlight. Billinghurst, and Raggleston with him, walked away along the edge of the turf, keeping to the shadow wherever possible, and the other two followed their uncertain lead across the dim chequer-work of the night; way being made from the disturbing wakefulness of the thoroughfare towards the quiet recesses of the Park. They walked with caution, and Arden and his man in silence, hurrying across the moonlit spaces, and pausing now and again in a patch of blackness to search into the uncer-

tain and formless shades around them, whose extent and perspective were made doubly indistinct, wavering and fathomless by the winking gleams of fixed and travelling lights beyond the boundaries. One of the big houses towards St. James's Place was brilliantly lighted up and Arden looked fearfully for interruption from its hither side, but Billinghurst knew his neighbourhood and had found nothing exceptional in the state of his gate-hinges.

He now halted his party at the intersection of a path running from the west, the angle of turf on the south side being studded with young trees, whose spacing allowed free movement in the open-work shadow of their slender and lightly fringed boughs, while, as he pointed out, their grouping would, at a little distance, secure them from notice on three sides at least.

The moon was not at the full, but she was shining with a good grace, making dim the diamond dust powdered over the blue-black heavens, and the sanded path between the immature grove on the corner of grass and the private gardens opposite, took up the white irradiation and turned the lightly laid shadows to ink.

One side of the angle had a containing rail, that its point might not be blunted by the hurrying feet of a people who cannot loiter even in a Green Park, and along the railing's length the growing plane trees were dotted irregularly, running back presently, with a widening interval, to the main footway. The space they embraced was filled with their woven shadows, which fell likewise athwart the way itself, where the trees' parent blackness touched the border, but left isolated and bright a rectangle of path perhaps thirty feet in length; forming the stage, as it were, of their small darkened amphitheatre of worn grass. Lord Billinghurst held counsel with Arden. He had held it, urgently, with Raggleston, as they came along and was sufficiently primed with the preliminaries of the business to assume their conduct at a pinch. They agreed in low voices on the advantage of the spot, and Billinghurst, with a bit of stick, drew a line across the middle of the arena, with a nervous inclination to soliloquy, repeating his instructions to himself in muttered tones.

Raggleston had shed his coat and waistcoat at the foot of a tree, and was rolling up the sleeves

of his soft shirt, and tightening the seaman's belt he still affected on the stable earth. The German was not behindhand. His "frac" was hung with respect on the iron railing and he was tying his embroidered braces about his middle, with difficulty but deliberately.

"When you are ready—" said Billinghurst, standing over the line he had drawn.

The combatants stepped onto the path and Arden, producing the swords from under his coat, offered the hilts across his arm to the German, who took one and swung the blade with a vicious "whit," and felt his wrist and shoulder. Raggleston armed himself also, and, as there was nothing to choose in position, the light falling full on Billinghurst's puckered countenance where he stood with outstretched hand between the two, took his ground on his friend's left. They brought their points under his palm, found their distance, and felt for their foothold. Arden noticed that Raggleston had cast his shoes and was standing in his socks. Arden faced Billinghurst, but a little back on the turf, that his shadow might not fall between.

"Are you ready?" asked Billinghurst, ner-

vously. *"En garde,* I mean—" Then, with clearness enough and withdrawing his hand, *"Allez!"* he said, and stepped back against the garden railings.

They did not move for some moments, but stood to position, glaring through the unaccustomed light with evident strain, and Arden's heart misgave him for his obstinacy. What he had seen as a midnight frolic might yet be the death of one of these. An exquisite fear broke over him, and he stood on one leg with excitement, like a schoolboy stealing some illicit joy. He could no longer see Billinghurst's face. Would they never begin?

The German stood nearly erect, though his long sword arm was at full stretch and his left at extension behind him, minimising the stride of his legs, which seemed too close together and wanting in spring. Raggleston stood lower, almost crouched, his left leg somewhat far behind, his disengaged arm so far over his head that his hand hung like a guard to his forehead. This was fashioned on a famous master of fence and had had in the original a something terrifying and of the desperado—generally justified in the

event. But Mr. Raggleston was not given to vain and joyous imaginings, and since he used the style he probably found it sit comfortably.

Point to point, they toed the ground cautiously and watched each other's frowning front. Then Raggleston leapt. There was a ringing encounter, a brisk flicker, and the German gave ground to the verge of the space, where Billinghurst stopped them. They were started again and at the *"Allez"* Raggleston attacked again. The German brought him up with the *coup d'arret* and attacked in his turn, but the Englishman showed admirable agility, though perhaps his striped socks twinkled faster than his blade.

The ring of steel was an inspiration and a fierce joy, and Arden and Billinghurst sprang backwards and forwards on the heels of the combatants, breathing hard with the single and thirsty emotion of the fighting animal, and scarcely repressing their encouragements. Once Billinghurst exclaimed hastily at a *"passé"* which in that false light might have traversed Raggleston's body, and once Raggleston swore furiously at the shadows. Then in a blind scurry of feet and swords the German lost his footing and came

down heavily on his side, Raggleston's sword going down with him, while his own broke under him in his hand, the point flying like an arrow. At the instant came the faint clang of a distant gate.

The German lay as he had fallen. Arden feeling it incumbent on him, as second, to do something, took him under the arm to raise him, and the three of them bent over him.

"Let him lie," said Raggleston hurriedly, stooping and picking up his sword by the blade.

"Must have hurt yourself, haven't you?" said Billinghurst, suspecting a sprain, but the German answered nothing, putting his hand through his shirt front. Raggleston, panting, looked closely at his point. The German withdrew his hand. The blood was thick on it. He uttered something between a grunt and a groan and Arden heard him say *"Mit mir ist's aus!"*

"By God! You've run him through, Jack!" cried Billinghurst, in horror. "He's had three inches, anyway," replied Raggleston, gloomily, gazing on his point.

Deggendorf groaned again and tried to sit up, but when Arden took him under the armpits and

supported his back with his knee, he cried out as if in sharp pain. Billinghurst ran for his coat. They made a pad of it, and laid him flat on the path, his head on its support, while Raggleston loosed the improvised girth and tore down the fold of his shirt. The German looked at him, all the pink gone now from his face, and his wryed mouth struck Raggleston with a clumsy contrition.

"I'm damned sorry," he said. "You slipped, you know. Or you'd have recovered yourself."

The other raised his head and looked again—past Raggleston. His senses were acute.

"Nehmen Sie sich in acht," he said placidly. *"Es Kommt Jemand."*

The other turned his head and followed his gaze, then started to his feet with an exclamation.

"There's someone coming! What shall we do?"

Hurried and irresolute the three stood over the hapless German, straining their eyes towards Buckingham Palace. As they looked, two dark figures emerged upon the expanse of Park, walk-

ing fast and straight, as another second made apparent, in their direction.

"They'll be on us in another minute," said Raggleston, losing no moment but tearing on his coat and catching up his boots. "Pick up the swords, Bill—got that key about you? You must see me through the house. This place isn't healthy for me."

Lord Billinghurst, unnerved and miserable, searched his pockets with shaking hands.

"We—we can't leave him here, Bill," he said in a breaking voice. "We must take him with us—"

"Rats!" exclaimed Raggleston inelegantly and angrily, on the ground again, hauling on his boots with furious haste. "You're not on the Veldt. They'll look after him as well as we can. But if we are caught here there'll be the devil to pay. Pick up the swords and come on."

"He's quite right," nodded Arden, who, though dashed in his ardour and awed by the immediate future, had still his wits about him. "We can be of no use to him. If we picked him up awkwardly we might kill him. At worst we can come back."

Billinghurst made broken protestations, but Raggleston was on his feet again, making up the path and calling on him to follow—and quickly. Arden took the young nobleman, all unwilling, by the arm, and urged him towards the house at a smart pace

"They will take him to the hospital," he said, looking over his shoulder as he ran. "It's the best thing that—Gad!" he broke off, "I've forgotten something," and dropped behind. He had remembered his visiting card, now in the Baron's pocket. Even a policeman could read that bit of evidence. Had he time? The others ran on and were out of sight in a moment. He turned onto the grass and ran back full tilt to the scene of action, to the German lying still and stretched on the path, one arm fumbling gently in his breast. Arden's heart smote him again. Raggleston's callousness and the cowardice of them all, to run, and leave the wretched man. He would stand by him and take the consequences. And with that the voices of the approaching strangers broke on his ear.

"Up to no good at this hour," he heard in harsh tones; and he saw again that his arrest

would lead to Raggleston's—a hanging matter—and the undeniable vicinity of St. George's Hospital was pressed upon him by his common sense acting with belated and uncommon insistence. And at the same instant he was filled with a consciousness of the futility of searching the unhappy German, to say nothing of the inhumanity. He had not a second at his command. The card must stay and he must go. He turned on his heel and ran all he knew up the Park side, holding on his hat, and gathering up the skirts of his coat. He thought he heard a call behind him, but had no doubt about a far more instant call in front, and ran hard.

"Fool that I was to go back," he said above his breath, gasping for wind, and running his hand along the railings in haste for the gate. "Confound it. Where is the thing? Surely they haven't locked it."

He rattled the handle and flung his weight upon it, but was repulsed. Stepping back, he looked up at the house and opened his mouth to call. It was the wrong one. He ran to the next but could see no light. Had he overshot it? He spurted down the path again only to see a man

coming up it at a run, and saw now, too late, the gleam of the library windows which he had passed in his flight, and knew that the gate was between him and his pursuer. Could he reach it first even, he would give the whole show away.

His short flurry had left him and he had no sooner spotted the house than he made up his mind to abandon that line of retreat, and to make for the open. The next moment he was speeding westward over the grass, and heard the heavy boots turn on the gravel and come thudding in his rear. There was an idle shout from the pavement on his right and he wheeled instinctively away from it. The move was correct though without judgment, for, Horsham House left behind, he knew but one bolt-hole and that the gate on Constitution Hill by which the interruption had come; for it was just humanly possible that it might have been left unlocked for the nonce.

He felt that he had the legs of his pursuer and, running more easily, was soon abreast once more of the little grove of plane-trees where they had fought. In spite of the pressing anxiety at his heels his mind was still occupied with the unfortunate gentleman he had been obliged to

leave to chance succour, and he turned his head as he passed the spot, but only to see a short, burly figure break from the screen of trees and run towards him on wavering legs, while the same harsh voice he had heard some minutes back hailed him to stop. This second intervener was hatless, having probably sprung, from bending over the helpless body on the path, to help in cutting off the fleeing midnight assassin, and the moonlight showed a massive head with features as harsh as the voice, but more familiar; for Arden instantly recognised the cartooned and caricatured Marquis of Horsham, Lord Billinghurst's father.

"Stop! I tell you! You, sir!" shouted the Marquis, raising his hand, and the strident voice carried authority, but he spoke to one undisciplined and travelling with considerable impetus. "Wants a word with me, too," thought Arden, "family weakness, evidently—never suspected it was congenital in Billinghurst." He was past the Marquis in three strides, but he raised his hat as he sped and panted apologetically "I am sorry—but I am in rather a hurry." His Lordship cursed him heartily for a scoundrel, but Arden was out

of hearing. "Think I've done enough for that family," he reflected, as he plunged across the grass and jumped in and out of the intersecting low-railed pathways, "and I'm not out of the wood yet—in all literalness. Gad! I'm sorry for Billinghurst—A damned disinheriting countenance, that! Useful man to have for a father, though—If Billinghurst stands in when it comes to clutches, he'd hardly be such a brute—such a Brutus as to hang us all. Lord! how hot I am!—where is this gate?" But he had run straight this time and now saw the gate in front of him; a few more strides and he was at it. The shouts behind him grew faint, while, through the railings in front, two lights resolved themselves into the lamps of a standing cab. If only—! Hoping against hope, but already planning alternatives, he reached the iron with outstretched hand—it yielded. By a violent constriction he mastered his pounding breath and full stretched muscles, and the next second emerged quietly on Constitution Hill. The cabman was just swinging himself onto his box, pipe in mouth. Another hansom was jingling rapidly away towards the gates,

its red lights diminishing as it ran by the garden wall.

"Hansom," said Arden, quietly, and stepped aboard with deliberateness.

The man picked up his reins with alacrity, staring at his fare with some surprise, for he had not seen him coming. "Drive up Piccadilly." "Very good, Sir," said the man, and turned his awakened steed, and rattled the whip handle in the socket. It was enough, and they passed rapidly from the scene. Arden looking out from the side window saw nothing but the reflection of his own heated face pressed against the glass, and heard no call. He of the voice had, fortunately, had no legs, and he with the legs had probably no breath. Arden himself was done. He sat back in the cab as limp as a rag, the perspiration streaking down his neck, and in his relief and his desire for air drew breath with an inhaustion that made his ribs crack. He dropped his hat by him on the seat and mopped with his handkerchief, the tepid town air affording no relief even under the rush of the cab. But Hyde Park Corner was reached and he must sit up. He was afraid of being recognised now, and wished that he had

taken any other route, for the road was bright, and the carriage traffic streaming west. At Hamilton Place there was a moment's pause, late as it was, and he tried to draw down the blind on the side where he was crouched, but it was a fixture. Feeling for his handkerchief again he searched the wrong pocket and his fingers met a soft-papered parcel—his disguise! He bounded in the cab. Had it been a fourwheeler he could have left it another man. The hansom had the advantage of looking-glasses but its dressing room was both public and cramped. His first thought was his club, but that might be the first thought of the present holder of his visiting card. And a Minister has many myrmidons. The hansom was bowling along Piccadilly again, his breath was coming back, and the draught of air was cooling him now, and he thought that if he made no false move in the next few minutes he saw his way to a peaceful interregnum under the irresponsible vicegerency of Lord Beauclerk. He had a good start and a disguise he was accustomed to, and had only to contrive a moment's concealment to issue upon the world a moustached and mon-

ocled adventurer, a man without a past and equal to any future.

Nothing so conceits one as a stroke of luck, the less deserved the better, whether the favouritism take the form of a straight nose, a streak of talent, or the mere finding open of a gate that should be shut; and Paul, out of the wood, thought himself a smart fellow to have found an exit, and capable of playing the hand Fortune had dealt him. Paul Arden should cease upon the midnight with no pain, and Lord Beauclerk should step across the footlights to a world where he might find scope for his remarkable powers of bamboozling the middle classes.

Solitude and a looking glass. Yes, they could be achieved. He thrust up the trap and instructed the cabman. They were crossing the Circus. "Back entrance," he shouted, "in Jermyn Street." The cab disentangled itself from the interwoven lines of clattering omnibuses, and the clamouring crowd in their wake, and drew rein at the double doors of a restaurant in the quieter thoroughfare.

He paid the man through the trap, and sprang across the pavement and over the threshold,

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where stairs led up and stairs led down. Arden went up, two stairs at a time, like a man who knew his mind, and also his whereabouts. At the top of the flight was the lavatory, lighted and deserted. He put down his hat and his stick on the dressing-table, drew forth and unrolled his parcel, and leaning across the basins, moistened the spirit gum and affixed the moustache with habile fingers. The eyeglass had a cord, an adjunct he had hitherto despised, but he could take no risks now, so he adjusted the *line de sauvetage* round his collar, and fixing the glass regarded himself with satisfaction. Daisy herself wouldn't know him.

Prepared now against interruption he considered his general appearance. A well-tied tie had stood the strain of the evening, but his hat and his trousers showed signs of the strenuous life.

He washed himself and brushed himself, and feeling an impulsion to hide as much of the real man as might be, put on a pair of stained gloves he found in his coat pocket. Then Lord Beauclerk, still admiring himself in the looking glass, was suddenly immersed in darkness by the switching off of the light.

CHAPTER VI

THE CLOAK OF NIGHT

HE made his way out and stumbled down the stairs, the quick-dried gum stiff on his upper lip, the moustache tickling his nose, his hand nervously groping for the dangling eyeglass.

Down below him in the passages the stentorian shouts of "closing time, please," mingled with the uproarious voices of the retiring company, and he found the swing door into the great bar-room blocked with struggling forms.

Pressing through, his face composed and his wits alert, he came full upon an acquaintance. Bobby Vane, a promising young brother of Molly's, stood leaning his back against the bar, his feet outspread, an empty glass in his hand, viewing the departing guests with a good na-

tured all-embracing smile that might have belonged to Mr. Spiers himself.

Bobby was not in the cast at Surwood, but looked in on their rehearsals at times. In cold daylight his character was too retiring to shine, but here he was evidently his own man, and Arden was moved to an amused sympathy, having felt the same—with a difference.. But this was a chance and not to be shirked. He walked slowly past him, looking him coldly up and down, through his eyeglass. After all, what business has he to be here, the young ruffian, he asked himself, the bearing of his outer man bringing the frame of mind into accordance.

But Bobby showed no resentment and no recognition. I'll try him further, thought Paul, greatly encouraged. Whatever happens I can keep my end up against Bobby Vane.

He turned and addressed him pleasantly from the painful rictus under his moustache.

"Good evening—or should I say good morning? Your name is Vane, is it not? I have met you with Mr. Arden, I think."

Bobby looked blank, then friendly with a sudden inner light, then blank again. However, he

set down his glass and grasped Arden's hand.

"Knew you at once," he said, "but you *are* Arden, aren't you?"

The other raised a supercilious brow and his glance passed for an infinitesimal moment to the empty tumbler.

"My name is Beauclerk," he said, mildly. Bobby was confused and abashed.

"Of course," he said, "you're not Arden. Don't know what made me think so. Yet I know your face. But as you say, you're a pal of his. I remember you—of course, perfectly well, awfully well—"

His assurances became rather inane, but they were honest enough, and Arden could read his ingenuous countenance like a contents bill. He had seen this acquaintance before, it said, knew that impertinent monocle and the slightly drawling tones, but couldn't separate Arden from his friend. Still he was a friend of Arden's and he certainly knew him. It was good enough. And even before he had arrived at this vaguest of conclusions, he was pressing Arden to have a drink. You and your friend, too, he felt inclined to say,

though his bodily sight was still single, though wavering.

But the officials were on them. "Closing time, PLEASE!" roared the voices.

"Just the splith of a second," said Bobby, insinuatingly to the giant at his elbow.

"None of it," said the man, briefly, and they were constrained to move.

"Never mind," said Bobby, "let's go and have a kidney."

"I fear it's too late," said Arden, "unless you know of—"

"You leave it all to me," answered Bobby. "The night is yet young." With which oracle Arden was obliged to be content, until Bobby, leading towards the Haymarket by devious ways, wheeled him sharply through a mean doorway propped some inches from closing point by the protruding nose of a small, stout Jew.

Another Jew with a ribbed shirt-front sat within behind a table in the passage, and a baize-covered board over his head with criss-cross tapes stuck with notes and telegrams, and a long row of pegs beyond him hung with hats, coats and

cloaks, lent the hall a certain imitation of a club entrance.

Vigorous response to stirring dance strains made the ceiling shake above them and a smell of grilled kidneys bore out Bobby Vane's confidence that their procurement might safely be left to him.

Other members were pressing in behind them, and followed by the short inquiry "your friend, Mr. Vane?" Mr. Vane and his friend passed up the stairs through the festive reek of gaslight, cigarette smoke, musk and mixed grill to the supper room set with small tables lighted each with a red shaded candle. Fit arrangement for a social club where friendship might warm to intimacy, nor Lamia meet the Sophist's "juggling eye."

They sat them down, and Arden, propping his elbows on the table, caressed and pointed his moustache with infinite gentleness, and after a little, being encouraged by the strangeness of his surroundings, dropped the half of his slim disguise, the eyeglass, and not apprehensive of his companion, whose gaze indeed rested anywhere

but on him, relaxed the tension of the last half hour and took occasion to reconsider himself.

Not only well intentioned, but positively well conducted, his steps had been turned homewards when this odd adventure had waylaid him, and he had been surprised into taking a hand in a business which had ended so tragically. He had embarked on it to assist in averting a quarrel; had been betrayed by the contrary event, and suddenly overwhelmed by the catastrophe which sent him a hunted creature through the streets of London, with a borrowed name and appearance, and only a haunting vision of a man's writhen features and bloody shirt to tell him he was that Paul Arden who had sauntered, cool and debonair, into Arlington Street two hours since.

He had left his club as clean living a young man as any in town, with a sister reliant on his good behaviour, the run of many reputable houses, and a smooth and open countenance.

Tomorrow—today—he was proscribed; his home debarred him; his sister would wait breakfast for him in vain; his club would be watched; his friends perverted and on the alert. He had but the clothes he sat in, and what sort of mo-

rality would be found in a man who could affront the sunlight in his evening clothes? He would look like a croupier, and probably sink to the deeper levels of Soho. Beauclerk—the name would suit excellently. Anyone would guess he had stolen it. Lord Beauclerk. He would be arrested for a runaway valet at the sound of it. Well, he could drop that, but these were his last hours of repute. Truly the clothes were the man, for unless he could lie in bed from dawn to dusk, the day would see him shunned by the veriest scallywag.

I have no choice, he reflected, looking around him, artistically pleased with the completeness of his downfall. I am forbidden the daylight—condemned to a perpetual wedding garment; and when I leave my couch of an evening this will be my breakfast—yes, breakfast!

He thought of the associations of the word, and sat before the smoking grill and whisky and soda with a fullness at his heart.

Bobby's return from a neighbouring table which he had been greatly enlivening and whence the revellers pursued him with shouts and invitation roused the reckless Beauclerk to shake off the

careful Arden. Tomorrow. Tomorrow, he might be in Pentonville. This was his *Henkersmahlzeit,* as the poor Freiherr might have said—his last supper. *Nunc vino!*

And if he had scruple to junket and carouse, why, like the Rev. Hopley Porter, he must do it on compulsion.

Bobby flung himself into his seat with a whoop. His evening was just beginning, he announced. Arden, feeling his way round to an inquiry as to whether Bobby had seen any of the dress rehearsals, said "You live at Surwood, don't you?"

"Yes," said Bobby, "but I am in town this month. Army exams coming on y' know. Must keep one's nose to the grindstone. Saw your friend Arden down there some weeks ago though. Rather a conceited beast, isn't he?"

Mr. Beauclerk shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Oh, I daresay you find him all right—" Bobby thought he was apologising. "Seem's to me I could make a better man out of chewed blotting paper. Don't know how my sister can stand him. But I believe she's rather soft on him; I know when I said—"

This will never do, thought Arden hastily. He

had vainly imagined immediately before his meeting with Bobby, that, for once in his life and perhaps alone among mankind, he could see himself as others saw him, but had not been prepared for such frightfully intimate revelations as these. Bobby's unvarnished opinions might possibly seem wholesome in the light of future days, but he could not betray Miss Vane's confidences from her brother's careless keeping, and would have snatched at any diversion at this moment. Happily, one came, and he drew Bobby's attention to a purple-faced man in crumpled clothes reckoning the company from the doorway.

Catching his eye, he advanced upon them slowly with an expression of forced joviality and rested his big coarse hands with knuckle-duster rings on the table.

"And 'ow are you, Mr. Vane," he said, while he looked at Arden. "What's it to be? Am I a-going to stand you a bottle of fizz, or are you going to stand me one?"

Arden would have replied promptly that he would neither pay for it if drunk, nor drink it if paid for, but Bobby, pleased to be recognised by the management, called for champagne. Pop

went half-a-crown and bang went a guinea. Arden shrugged his shoulders but saw justice in the youth being fined a bottle for his free speaking, but when the proprietor moved on, seeking whom he could induce to crack bottles on the same terms for the good of the house, he expressed his opinion that it was a "rush." Bobby resented this as unhandsome. "You're such a dashed depressing sort of chap," he said, not without justice. After all, a bust was a bust. Bobby was enjoying himself. He looked as smart as paint. He wore a buttonhole. His clean, vacant young face showed nothing but the joy of life. He was going through his "classes au café de Madrid." Night classes where the course instructs ingenuous youth in the manners acceptable to spheres beyond; divests him of foolish diffidence and unremunerative respect for the other sex; gives him that happy abandon and freedom of address which marks the real right sort and differentiates him from the young man of lesser educational advantage—who, left constitutionally unable to adopt the what-ho! and pip-pip! style of entry on social gatherings makes an unequal fight in circles where he is shunned by the brothers, bullied by the mothers,

and openly insulted by the daughters, and finally drifts among, and marries into, strata of pre-victorian dulness unemancipated from politeness, unenlivened by license, undistinguished by scandal, and unrelieved by divorce.

Bobby Vane was well determined that no such vista should open to him, and leaving the supper room announced that he was going "to throw himself about a bit." Towards two o'clock, having met with a rebuff at the hands of an instructress in modern midnight conversation, and feeling like young Saint Kevin in the ballad, he suggested a move to the "Stable"—'cause it's full of crocks," he explained at a door where misogynists maintained a separate establishment, and the next period was passed in a large room blue with cigar-smoke where some celebrated comedians were being courted and treated by their admirers, some young soldiers loud of voice and laugh, some racing men out of employment, a journalist writing a play notice, and quantum suff. of hardened night birds, who revive with the gaslight, and wane with the same. Thence, indifferent to time, and indeed glad to prolong the night, and suiting himself to his various company with phi-

losophy, Arden supported Bobby's steps through sleeping by-streets—"I don't know your name, Sir," said Bobby, with tipsy courtesy, "but may I take your arm?"—or sped with him in night-flying hansoms, to clubs whose reserve broke down as morning grew, and let in the stranger without ceremony.

It was broad day before they parted. As Mr. Beauclerk grew in favour the more he heard to the disadvantage of Mr. Arden, and he did vicarious reparation for the offences of that once self-sufficient gentleman. One bit of news he gathered and, though not very astonishing, he scarcely knew how to accept it. Bobby knew Raggleston. At a distance. And Raggleston also was in his bad books. Paul, scenting information, pressed for the grievance. At a dance, then, Raggleston had monopolised a young woman whom Bobby secretly admired. Confidential now, he spoke her name. She was the sister of that fellow Arden. But worth a hundred of him, mind you. Paul, shocked at the facility with which secrets fell into the hands of Mr. Beauclerk, and unable to show the surprise necessary to obtain a re-affirmation, asked casually as he could, under

cover of Raggleston and his doings, where was the dance?

Grosvenor Place. A true bill, thought Arden. I remember Daisy going to a dance somewhere there with the Bletchleys in the Spring. I remember her account of Bobby in the doorway; but she said nothing about any Raggleston. By Jove, my girl, I'll be even with you. "A bad tempered brute, Raggleston," Bobby was affirming. He had not been civil to Bobby.

"Oh, he's a decent enough fellow, according to his lights," said Arden, thinking he had better perhaps speak up for him in the circumstances.

"Know nothing about his lights," said Bobby. "I'm complaining of his liver."

"You're rather hard on your friends, Mr. Vane," said Paul, as they stood on the pavement.

"It's a bad world," said Bobby, sententiously, "and the fewer people you praise the better."

Maintaining this dogged misanthropy, he was helped into a final cab, bestowing a penny upon the ragged cab-runner who pressed for remembrance. "And don't make a beast of yourself with it," he said severely.

Paul found himself alone on the kerbstone in

the growing sunlight. A hundred yards away a string of market-wagons, piled extravagantly high with greenstuff, occupied the thoroughfare and held the eye as on a country road. Their harness-brasses jingled and caught the yellow light, and the blind buildings in widening perspective, threw back the gathering rumble of their advance.

He was close to Covent Garden and turned idly eastward, yawning as he went and vacant of purpose. Flocks of pigeons were alert on their noisy wings. The perambulating coffee-stall wheeled briskly along the gutter; and more than once he espied on side-streets some poor trunk of humanity, or *cul-de-jatte,* unhardened to his fate by the necessity of exhibiting himself for alms, go dragging along the bare pavement in the morning air, during its hour of unbreathed cleanness, before the town opened its eyes.

And now he must find a bed, for he was dog-tired, leg-weary and heavy-eyed, and eternally conscious of that Nemesis at his heels. Where was that black-avised ruffian, Raggleston? And where the unhappily circumstanced Billinghurst? And how was it with the unfortunate Freiherr?

—whom, somehow, he could only picture as he last saw him, lying on the path, his hand to his bosom.

A plain fronted hotel with a night-lamp still burning, seemed to answer his necessity, and he rang the bell, leaning heavily against the door-post as he waited. A porter appeared and after a moment's demur led him upstairs to a bedroom which looked oddly fresh at such an hour; here he left him and descended to open the house and start the business of the day.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN THE WINE IS OUT

BARRED from free entry to its railway stations how shorn of enjoyment would the London public be! Rather its Parks, rather its public houses, rather, far rather, its museums, galleries, and libraries, than the great termini, where the idler may enjoy the strenuous life of others, where the houseless shelter, where the poor find life, colour, and movement, and many an unconsidered, or forgotten, trifle, where the busy may be busy to distraction, and the spectator sit all day on benches in the best position. Best substitute for the Café, where the unemployed may glance at the papers, watch the hurrying passers, while away his time by free fires in the winter and in cool draughts in the summer, meet long lost

friends, make new acquaintanceships or mar old ones by the turn of an answer to the interrogatory traveller, see an occasional accident, or at poorest, a thousand mishaps and contretemps, and minor tragedies and comedies.

No unit in the mass, from the station-master on his swift minatory passage to the telegraph-boy in cheerful voiced leisure; the slow porter making, *sero sed serio,* towards the whistling train and the agonised pilgrim, or the paper-boy, indifferent, at home, and at rest, on an empty trolly, bears any seal of officialdom. He is labelled but not stamped. He is a man and a brother, and do you enlist or denounce him, it lies between you. No hard corner of a machine meets you which you hammer to your own hurt, or vainly oil. He is the individual and detached genius of the great rule of thumb whereby the makeshift and piecemeal agglomeration of a dozen great industries and businesses for ever being drawn on, are wonderfully supplied, preserved and dealt round.

The perturbed spirit of a Londoner seeks a railway station by instinct. With a friend he goes to a club. With his wife, to the shops. With his

children, to the Park. But by himself, to a station; whence all corners of the earth are open to him; whither come all men and all news.

Jack Raggleston walked Victoria station between twelve and one o'clock on the following day, vaguely relieved to have vacancy of purpose filled by the stopgap of bustle. He had slept none the worse for his misdeeds, and if he ran over the timetable rather indifferently it was not that his resolution had been staggered by the unhappy event of the duel, but merely that, the duel over, he wondered what he had fought for.

As far as the quest was concerned, as Billinghurst's man had called it, it was plainly to him. He had won it by arbitration and by force of arms, both, and he was not the man to abandon his rights on a scruple, or to regret anything that Mr. Jack Raggleston had ever done. But whether to push his advantage or no he was of two minds.

His spirit of contradiction had been roused by the German, but, the German eliminated, another face than Miss Heimer's interposed, and eclipsed her darker attraction. He had known Miss Heimer well last year, and this summer he was to

have joined her house party wherever she should establish herself. He had but to call to make sure of the invitation, and yet, while he might have hailed that invitation as a relief from his immediate position, to take the initiatory step on the path made clear for him seemed beyond his resolution and even outside his desires.

Mr. Raggleston felt "humped" and truth to tell, did not know what he wanted; and it was more than his deserts that, when he turned for the half-dozenth time, through the ticket-offices to the wet cab-filled station yard, a hansom should clatter up the paved way, and frame behind its rain-streaked glass the face of his meditations. The hump fell from his shoulders, which straightened magically, and the pretty face, too, smiled above the hansom doors in perhaps its first gleam of sunshine that morning, for anxiety marked it, as well as the momentary pleasure.

"How do you do, Miss Arden," cried Raggleston, as soon as the glass was pulled up. "Where are you going? And may I go too?"

"Oh Mr. Raggleston, I am not sorry to see you," cried the young lady.

"But you are not enthusiastic about it."

"I mean that I am in trouble. My father is away and I can't find my brother anywhere. I fear that something dreadful has happened to him."

The voice was eager and distressed. Raggleston saw that she was in genuine trouble, and Miss Heimer, his calculations, and his misdoings vanished like smoke. He helped her out with solicitude and walked slowly into the station with her, hearing her tale.

"You don't know my brother, do you?" she asked anxiously. Raggleston shook his head.

"I wish you did," she sighed. "You might help me to find him."

"I'll find him for you," said Raggleston with ignorant confidence, "but what has happened?"

Daisy told him about the theatricals, and recounted Paul's habitudes and excellencies, unconsciously discounting much of the character when she followed it up with the documentary evidence of a telegram received that morning.

"I came down to breakfast and found that he was still away," she detailed tragically. Later on comes this telegram: "Detained by morning performance."

Raggleston read it gravely. He had written such himself.

"And that is not the worst of it, Mr. Raggleston," she paused in bright-eyed indignation. "Either Paul is intentionally misleading me, or there has been some incomprehensible mistake. I had a visit this morning—a most extraordinary account"—she stopped, looking ready to cry. "But I must know for myself. I am going down to Surwood to see whether he truly and really acts there this morning." Raggleston looked at the telegram in his hand. It bore the Leicester Square stamp. She mustn't go to Surwood, he thought. I wish she would tell me all about it. Daisy was already looking at the placarded time-tables. She had not raised her veil above her eyes, but he thought that they were reddened, and he was filled with pious anger and grief. "Wretched young brute," he said to himself, "messing about the place with a sister like that to look after. *I'll* find him—and walk into his affections too." Had it been *his* sister he thought. But the point was, in the historian's view, that she was not his sister. He approached her with a determined sympathy.

"I wish you would tell me all that has happened," he said simply.

Daisy wanted no pressing. It seemed then, that just before she had set out, a certain Mr. West has been announced, and, after some preliminary words, had informed her that he was Lord Horsham's private secretary. Raggleston started at this.

"Do you know him?" asked Daisy hopefully.

"I know who you mean," answered Ruggleston, unhelpfully.

She proceeded, "He told me the most extravagant story, Mr. Raggleston. He was very nice and kind and polite, but imagine my feelings when he said that he was making inquiries, on behalf of Lord Horsham, for my brother Paul, whose visiting card had been found on the body of some man discovered badly injured in one of the parks last night; and that trace of him had also been found in Lord Horsham's town house where there had apparently been a quarrel. Oh! Mr. Raggleston, why do you look so queer? Surely—surely you don't think that Paul could have had anything to do with such a business?

Isn't Lord Horsham a dreadfully silly man? I have often heard my father abuse him."

Raggleston had felt himself turn all the colours of the rainbow, and now stared gloomily on the ground trying to collect his wits.

"Have you heard anything about it? Is there anything in the papers? But no, Mr. West said that nothing should be done without my knowledge. But he said we *must* find my brother, and get at the truth. And we must. Do answer, Mr. Raggleston," she said impatiently.

Raggleston was not in the habit of weighing pros and cons. A difficulty presented but one side to him, and on that he was given to act. Suddenly as Paul's identity and the widening effect of his own actions had been brought home to him he recognised that Paul could be in no real danger. Also that he was not to blame; that it was no good Daisy going to Surwood; and last, but not least, that sorry as he was for her state of mind, number one must have a little consideration. A breathing space—say an hour or two.

"I think your going to Surwood is of no use,"

he said, and he pointed out the defect of the telegram. "It would only make people talk. He is evidently in town. I think he is in an awkward position, though perhaps quite innocent, and does not want to alarm you."

Daisy heard him gratefully.

"Er—oddly enough, I happen to know Lord Horsham's eldest son rather well, and if you will allow me to consult him I may be able to tell you something about it."

"But surely Lord Horsham would have asked him," said Daisy wonderingly.

"Well, the fact is," said Raggleston half apologetically, "they are not always of one mind. In fact I believe Billinghurst is at this moment staying with his aunt, Lady Theodosia Jayne, in Chelsea. I'll go and see him. He'll know all—I mean he may have heard something about it."

"Can't I see him, too?" said the anxious sister.

"Of course you can," said Raggleston admiringly. "Let us have some lunch now, and go together to Chelsea afterwards."

Miss Arden looked upon him doubtingly and turned the proposal in her mind, but a diversion

was brought about before she could accede or refuse.

Preceded by porters wheeling immense dress trunks under the supervision of a footman carrying a strap-load of novels and a covered dressing case; followed by two maids laden with dust cloaks, monogrammed cushions, *en tout cas* with gold tops in shining variety, bird cages, keys, and tickets; and attended by an elderly companion bearing a small dog in her arms and leading a frizzed poodle by a glittering chain, came a young woman on whose well developed form Bond Street and Dover Street, Fifth Avenue, and the Rue de la Paix had wreaked their best.

The amateur of stations would have recognised in her one of the consolations of his day; the meditations of a man would have been converted into a softly whistled tune by her appearance on the scene; and any woman would have stopped talking to look at her. As Daisy did. Her very dark hair was trained upwards and outwards—we speak stammeringly and ignorantly—and there pinned, ondulated and lustred to a wonder under the—happily there is a word for this—the creation which crowned it. White suede gloves under

ruffled wrists of lawn held a jewelled lorgnon secured to a jewelled chain outside the figure-long grey cloth coat; raising the glass she surveyed the scene and met Daisy's impartial eyes. Raggleston saw that he was overlooked, and, interpreting the unmistakeable fixity of glance, turned to see the arrival for himself.

Miss Arden was rightly served for her distraction. "Miss Heimer!" exclaimed Raggleston.

"Mr. Raggleston, I do declare!" exclaimed the apparition, mantling with smiles, and extending her white-gloved finger tips in the best humoured greeting. "That's the advantage of a little country. You spot your friends at once."

The eyes were humourous and intelligent, the face genial and warm-coloured, and if its red and white was chiefly in the lips and teeth, that red and white was so expressive that Miss Arden, though now in the background, lowered her point and almost smiled; so that, after the first greetings, Raggleston, seeing that Miss Heimer was evidently bent on a chat, was encouraged to make them known to one another.

Miss Heimer loved meeting new people, and beamed quite affectionately.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance," she said, adding unnecessarily "I am from America. Troy in Noo York State is my little home. When I am over here, Mr. Raggleston does not let me feel lonely. He is always ready—"

"To go anywhere and do anything," said Daisy smiling.

"That's so," assented Miss Heimer's high accents, and a wink trembled on one eyelid, but didn't fall.

"And you are off to the Isle of Wight?" said Raggleston, with a too ready interest.

"You saw that in the paper! I don't write him my movements, Miss Arden, though he'd like you to believe it."

Raggleston grinned rather painfully.

"And how is Lord Billinghurst?"

"Oh, he's salubrious, and pursuing his studies."

"Then I guess you haven't been near him lately. But tell me, now do, Mr. Raggleston, have you come across a great friend of mine, Freiherr von Deggendorf, who is in England now? I know he has introductions to your friends in Arlington Street. A tall man, fair—"

"Yes, I know him," said Raggleston wincing.

"He was to have met me here this morning; in fact we were to travel down together" (Oh, were you? thought Raggleston), "but he seems to have let me through, and I've had no express from him. Have you seen him lately?"

"I saw him last night," said Raggleston, consigning the smiling heiress for whom he had argued, fought, and fled by night; her retinue, her lap-dogs and her lorgnon, to the very deuce.

"Oh, my! And did you see Julius last night! And he wasn't sick?"

"He was all right when I met him." Perhaps he found it impossible to keep all accent off the word, or perhaps the other merely pursued her chaff about the deteriorating effect of his companionship; but she pushed the inquiry.

"Was he all right when you left him, though?"

Raggleston was in torment. His sins pursued him. They barred the courses of other people's lives, and diverted them upon him. Everyone stumbled over that body in the path. Undiplomatic and short-tempered, irritation seized him at being cornered in this manner, and he replied with unpardonable shortness that if he knew anything more about Julius, might he be—forgiven.

"My! Your liver is out of order, Mr. Raggleston," said Miss Heimer, surprised but not angry. "I had better proceed. Forgive me, Miss Arden, for keeping you standing here. I hope we shall see each other again."

Miss Heimer and her following moved through the platform gates, a sheaf of illustrated papers added to her impedimenta, or, at least, to her companion's.

Daisy had pressed all her amiability into her *au revoir* to make amends for their friend's incomprehensible brusqueness, but, left alone with him, she withdrew its influence, angry at a rudeness which seemed to involve her. They moved out of the station in silence, and Daisy hoped that he was ashamed of himself. Had she heard his unspoken comments as they went, she might indeed have thought less of his utterance.

Without overt arrangement they made their way to some luncheon rooms in Victoria Street. He sat and watched her taking off her gloves, disdainful and admirable, and the necessity of making his peace overcame him.

"Was I very rude?" he asked, biting his lips.

"You behaved like a savage," replied his vis-à-vis with the utmost severity.

"I hate to be bottled like that," growled Raggleston. "What should I know about her Julius?"

"She would certainly have done well not to speak to you. But she will probably know better in future. I can only regret that I myself 'bottled' you so effectually, Mr. Raggleston."

He was sorry for himself then; but when Miss Arden commented on the absurd and petty jealousy that could not bear a civil inquiry after another friend, Raggleston rejected the insinuation with an energy of adjective that got him into further trouble. This could not continue. He climbed down, and made a crawling apology, but he was severely handled, and received such a lecture on manners, as had, unfortunately, seldom fallen on him before. He sat and took it, and, helped by a secret sense of wrong, made the most of by his customary single-minded attention to his own injuries, he gazed on the lecturer's serious grey eyes without resentment, and promised to mend.

Perhaps that energetic denial had softened her

a little. The storm blew over. He sought to enlist her sympathy, and said:

"I know I am rather a rough, but I have had a rough time."

"Why did you not stay in California? I wonder you left it since you have such a dislike for civilised life."

"Perhaps I had better go back then," said Raggleston, clouding over again.

"I am sure you would like it better," she said sweetly.

Raggleston shrugged his shoulders, not to be beaten. "Any country is a good place if you hold the dollars, and any country is a pretty cold place if you're broke. London is certainly a fool location for a poor man."

"I suppose you mean he is unwise to live here. But, Mr. Raggleston, you can't have everything you want by asking for it."

"No, and yet I have known people to complain that they had to ask for everything they wanted. I suppose there is always something between you and your desires, if it's only a bell handle."

Daisy smiled. "Daily dinner is the chief desideratum here below; yet as a housekeeper I some-

times wonder which I most dislike, ordering it, eating it, or paying for it."

Raggleston, his elbows squared on the table, sat and gazed attentively into the fresh delicate face and contained eyes, admiring the sense and sweetness of the expression. She took his gaze gravely, until the recollection of an elementary precept in the subject of her late address made him sit up hurriedly.

"I was admiring that splendid institution, the British Housekeeper," he said.

"She does her best," said Daisy, preparing to go, "but even home-keeping people have their trials."

"Yes," said Raggleston, following; "when I was at the front my father wrote to me 'truly War is Hell, with the income tax at a shilling.' I saw then what a soft time I was having."

"You have a keen sense of your wrongs, Mr. Raggleston," said Daisy as they descended the stairs. "Do you never tread on anyone else's corns?"

Raggleston was silent, but was careful at any rate not to tread on her dress.

He had never quite lost that best possession of

the schoolboy—the sense that responsibility for his crimes rests on the shoulders of the authorities. To him the Moral Law is an embodied thing. It wears a black coat and has a cane. His attitude towards it knows no reserve. It is the open enemy. Can he outrage it and escape, he goes to bed chuckling. In after years the enemy slowly disembodies and becomes his intimate, and in most cases, happily for society, his friend, but some there are who, like our acquaintance Raggleston, resent the forced companionship, and try to restore the ghost to the material form of the authority of the moment. Their employer must see that his time is not wasted. Do they evade an impost, let the Revenue look to it. Have they a headache in the morning, it is the quality of the wine. Do they escape scotfree from the *liaison dangereuse,* like the schoolboy they chuckle. It was high time that someone took Mr. Raggleston in hand. As they set out on their mission he was conscious of a thrill of gratitude that it had not been Arden whom he had left in the Park, and that he was able to join honestly in the search. Had it been Arden he thought, and he must meet Daisy's grey eyes! As it was he scarcely knew

how to keep his confession from her when she turned them on him, so guilty his hang-dog conscience showed before them. Surely regeneration was working.

Steep narrow steps led up to Lady Theodosia's pedimented doorway, the lower windows were barred with iron scrolls, and the brickwork was of invisible, or Chelsea, red.

"Hope to heaven she's out," said Raggleston, as he rang. "We don't want to see her."

Daisy was only anxious about Paul, and hoped that someone might be in. A butler appeared and in answer to Daisy said that Lady Theodosia was out.

"Good business," muttered Raggleston, and had opened his mouth to ask for Billinghurst, when a voice behind him exclaimed briskly, "No she isn't! She's just come back." A small stout lady was climbing the steps behind them, and, as Daisy turned, the butler added in a low voice: "Here is her Ladyship, Miss."

CHAPTER VIII

A BLIND TRAIL

"AND what's the matter with *you,* Mr. Raggleston?" asked the lady of the house, pausing on the top step, her hands full of books and parcels. "It's a long time since you honoured me with a visit. No doubt you have something interesting to tell me."

With good humoured appreciation she looked at Daisy, who turned pink, and as for Raggleston, at this fresh misunderstanding his red face became plum colour. But to Daisy's admiration, he cast himself into the imminent deadly breach. He introduced her. "Miss Arden is in distress about her brother," he said, "and has come hoping to see Lord Billinghurst, who is, I believe, a friend of his. Am I right in thinking he is with you?

I met Miss Arden near here and I offered to show her where you lived. I was sure she might count on your help, Lady Theo."

"Why, certainly," replied Lady Theodosia, disengaging a hand with some dexterity, and not in the least taken in. "Come upstairs. If your brother is only a friend of Lord Billinghurst's there may be hope for him, but if he's a friend of Mr. Raggleston's there is no saying."

She sent the butler to see if Lord Billinghurst was in the study, and to bid him come upstairs to them, and Daisy gave her companion a glance intending rebuke for the strain he had put on their plain tale. He took it as a reproach to his reputation and was not moved to love for his hostess. But the meeting was not to be. Lord Billinghurst, as it afterwards transpired, hearing the front door bell, had departed by the back, through the garden entry. His aunt's friends were not his, and had the Chelsea earth had no bolt-hole he would not have sought it so often.

Lady Theodosia heard Miss Arden's story with many impatient "what's," for the good lady's readiness to lead the conversation grew out of

her slowness to follow it, for she was rather deaf to unaccustomed voices.

Raggleston preserved a masterly silence. He had hoped to find his ally who could have shown the necessary sympathy without unnecessary action, but his aunt's intervention threatened action without sympathy. Holding that Paul had been kidnapped as an awkward witness to a deed of violence, she showed more indignation at the outrage than feeling for the victim. She would have enlisted any day under the Avenging rather than under the Ministering angel. Neither did she hesitate to put a name to the criminals. "The country is full of men brutalised by war," she said, with a fighting eye on the retired yeoman, "fresh from the massacre and glutted with the plunder, of unprepared and defenceless shepherds, whose sole property was their trusty rifles. Trained to violence and robbery they pursue their ends without regard to the laws of God and man. Wealth crosses their vision, and to follow it they do not stick at bloodshed. We must protect ourselves."

Raggleston began to feel pretty bad again, but Daisy, resting her peace-loving eyes on him,

credited herself with the stilling of his patriotic resentment.

Lady Theodosia, unable to get a rise out of him, and fired by the unforeseen word, protect, tried another gambit.

At the moment, the many headed multitude sick and tired of a monotonous millennium, and a damnable iteration of surpluses, was tickled with a scheme for cutting the profits and letting the losses run.

Chancellors of Exchequer were a three-a-penny and the papers teemed with letters from a suddenly enlightened public demanding to know why the foreigner should be allowed to supply it with goods which it could make for itself for twice the money.

"Protection is indeed the word," cried Lady Theodosia. "For under protection there would be no such visions of wealth to distract the poor. How cheaply they live on the Continent! What makes their life cheap? Protection!"

"Life's pretty dear in America," hazarded Raggleston.

"Then how well off they must be to afford it!" she cried in triumph. "What makes them well

off? Protection! My dear—" she broke off, turning to Daisy again; you had better stay to tea, and come and hear my lecture at the Church Rooms, this evening. I can speak better than I can listen; but it enables me to turn a deaf ear to much foolish argument."

Daisy smiled and understood, but excused herself on the ground of her anxiety. The interview had not been productive and she was impatient to be off.

"And what does your brother do when he *is* upon the scene? Nothing? That's bad. What does your father say to that? Has he no business to put him into?"

Daisy, compliant, said that it was open to him to become a publisher.

"A publican," screamed Lady Theodosia.

"A publisher!" roared Raggleston, annoyed.

"A publisher!" she cried, springing back into smiles, and more than smiles. "What? Arden and Arden? My dear, I must come and see you. Where do you live? I must know the end of this mystery, and help you to find your brother. Arden and Arden! I should like extremely to meet your father. I have a little brochure in hand

now that— I am sorry you should have been disappointed in the object of your visit. My nephew has an extraordinary knack of never being on hand when I want him. But I will ask him about it. Arden and Arden! Well! well! I am very glad to have met you. Goodbye, Mr. Raggleston, and mind you do all you can for Miss Arden. But I needn't tell him that," she added, to herself as she thought.

Raggleston was glad to get away. It was still raining though, and the flush doorways of the narrow street afforded no harbourage, and its seclusion promised no rescuing cab. They turned their backs on the broad shining embankment and the turbid river, appearing as one great waste of water, and plunged into the maze of mean streets leading to the Fulham Road.

"Better than Lady Theo's lecture, anyway," said Raggleston, as they walked briskly through the puddles, "though I grant you that might have been dryer."

They crossed the thoroughfare without coming on a cab, and, unwilling to wait, held on their course through Evelyn Gardens, but, the rain coming on more heavily, took shelter in the roomy

porch of a corner house. Another refugee was before them, wiping the drops from his hat, and on joining him they recognised the ingenuous countenance of Mr. Bobby Vane frowning on the spotted lustre.

"Tile off still, Bobby?" inquired Raggleston kindly, shaking out his umbrella, but it was Daisy's smiling eyes worked the havoc.

Poor Bobby dropped his hat, swooped on it, dropped his stick, picked it up, put on his hat, took it off in salutation, and for a minute or more could not get his equanimity. To combine stiffness to Raggleston's familiarity and a smiling contempt for his chaff, with warmth to Daisy tempered by reproach for her company, taxed his bearing and over-taxed his powers of speech.

"Why don't you ring the bell?" asked Raggleston, who thought the porch a nice size for two. "Don't pretend you're not calling here. He's a regular dog, Miss Arden. This is where his best girl lives, I expect."

"I am sure that Mr. Vane has no 'best girl' in view," said Daisy, smiling on him, and Bobby shook his unready noddle. But Raggleston laughed loudly.

"That disposes of you, Miss Arden," he said with effrontery. "I told you that she was on the other side of the door."

But Daisy smoothered the ruffled sensibilities, and talked of things indifferent, until Bobby, coherent again, asked after Paul. Daisy became grave.

"I'm rather anxious about Paul," she said. "Have you seen him lately, Mr. Vane? Were you at Surwood this morning?"

Bobby had not been at Surwood of late, but brightening at the chance of giving welcome information, said "I saw a friend of his last night, a Mr. Beauclerk."

Daisy's face had no answering light. Another friend of his whom I don't know, she thought with a pang.

"He said that your brother was a great friend of his," pursued Bobby, rubbing it in. "You know him?" he said to Ragglest

"Not I," said Raggleston.

"He said he knew you," persisted Bobby, doubtingly.

"Don't know the name," said Raggleston. "What did he look like?"

Bobby described him.

"I'd know no man with an eyeglass," said Raggleston. "He must have been a champion liar too. Where did you meet him? How do you come across such people?'

"At the Criterion Restaurant," said Bobby, with cold dignity, but rather hot about the ears. Daisy's gaze was fixed on him, but she was trying to resolve an impalpable and runaway likeness called up by Bobby's description.

"He said he was a great friend of Paul's," she repeated, quite at a loss.

"He said so," said Bobby, sticking to his guns; "I remember thinking that he was rather like your brother, except for—except that—" And then Daisy saw it.

"It was Paul," she cried; "Mr. Raggleston, it was Paul. It was his make-up. And that was the name." She explained to Raggleston, and her words should have made it still clearer to Bobby, though why Arden should call himself Beauclerk and leave his appointed stage to harry him, Bobby, and betray his confidence seemed but one of the causeless perplexities of a nightmare where he groped horridly for certain half forgot-

ten utterances and opinions and doings of his own.

And now Raggleston took up the inquiry again, and pressed him pitilessly. Where had they gone when they left the Criterion? And then? And after? And what had they done there?

In vain did Bobby endeavour to convey as from one man of the world to another, that these things might not be spoken of before Miss Arden. Raggleston put him through the examination as to character. What club? A supper club. What was that?

The Judicial ignorance must be satisfied, and Bobby grilled like the last night's kidneys.

Did he take Beauclerk there or Beauclerk him? "I told you he was a dog." This for the benefit of the court, who pitied the confusion of the witness, but supported the inquiry.

And who else did they meet? And at what time did they part company?

"Well, you look nice and fresh still, upon my word." And where did Beauclerk go?

Bobby could not say, so the sister was disappointed in the end. And where did Bobby go?

Bobby did not know whether to ring the bell after all and face a houseful of strangers, or to rush away into the cool of the downpour. But Daisy stopped the Inquisition. She was satisfied that Beauclerk was Paul, though dismayed at the Hyde-like development of that new shape. "How can he be so foolish and so wicked?" she cried despairingly. "Why doesn't he come home? If only I knew his address! Mr. Vane, don't you think you could go to that—to those places again, tonight, or some of them, and see if you could find him?"

"Scandalous!" shouted Raggleston. "This the ennobling influence of woman. Miss Arden, you astound me."

"Oh, do be quiet," implored Daisy; "they will hear you in the house. And you must help, and not throw difficulties in the way."

"I will go with Bobby on his rounds," said Raggleston solemnly, "if it cost me my reputation. I will be his guest tonight."

"Dear Mr. Vane, please forgive us for asking so many questions, but if you come across my brother again you will tell him, will you not, that I want to see him at once? And now there is a

cab at last. Do call it for I must get home. They will think I am lost too."

She was helped in with all devotion, the cab-man instructed, and the four-wheeler crawled away.

Daisy hoped that the occupants of the porch might get away before it became too small to hold them. "He is a dreadful person to deal with," she acknowledged to herself with a smile and a sigh, and we fear that the useful and deserving Bobby was soon out of mind.

A spinster's solitary tea was set in her own little room, and the big house seemed very still and depressing. The wet gardens showed not a cat or a sparrow to the tradesman's boy rubbing his basket along the length of railing. The voices in the servants' hall came up faintly with occasional bursts of jarring laughter, as she wandered restlessly up and down stairs.

In her father's room the blinds were drawn, and in the dun light accumulated circulars rose in ghostly piles on the desk, the wraiths of last month's cigars lurked in the drooping curtains, and the pathos of the empty chair was as poignant as usual.

But the climax was to come.

The post before dinner brought her a letter on which she fell eagerly, hoping to hear from Paul, but the writing destroyed the hope. The envelope was sealed largely with black wax. She opened it and read:

MADAM:—

Since my Secretary, Mr. West, waited on you this morning by my wish, to acquaint you with certain facts concerning Mr. Paul Arden, I grieve to say that I have received a most particular account of the affair from a Mr. Beauclerk, who will be known to you as an old and intimate friend of your brother's; an account which leaves no doubt that Mr. Paul Arden was sufficiently rash and misguided to fight a duel with swords last night outside this house, thereby endangering the life of his opponent and putting himself in a most perilous position. It is most painful to me to communicate news of such distressing and shocking import, but I feel it my duty to warn you, in the unfortunate absence of Mr. Arden, who is, I hear, out of England, that every endeavour must and will be made, if not to apprehend,

to find the delinquent. This information is consonant with my promise to keep you instructed, and I trust that you will use your best endeavours to bring the unhappy boy from his hiding-place, nor aid him in a concealment which must eventually prove futile. Pray accept the assurance of my sympathy, and hold Mr. West at your command should you desire advice or assistance.

I am, Madam, your obedient servant,

HORSHAM.

But for the blessed name of Beauclerk in this truly terrible letter it would be hard to surmise its effect on the abandoned sister. Mr. Beauclerk, that "old and intimate friend" of her brother's, cropping up again in the thick of this business, and now as a hostile witness, reduced her at first to a stony stupefaction.

That Paul should be silly enough to go masquerading in Bobby's company through the midnight hours, was possible. That he should have been mad and wicked enough to fight a duel was at least thinkable. But that he should continue his pantomime in the cold daylight to give evi-

dence against himself—that reduced it to an absurdity.

She had been wrong. Beauclerk was beyond possibility of doubt, a friend of his—a friend of whom he had been ashamed. A dangerous and bad friend who had led him into harm, and who had finally proved false and betrayed him. A scoundrel!

And yet Paul? Who told her everything. Who was such a good brother. Who scarcely ever left her. Surely the theatricals were no invention. She scouted the notion—she was giving way to foolish terror. The Vanes were well known to her, and only that afternoon she had seen Bobby and had spoken of the acting and of Paul's part, and he had given confirmation.

"No! No!" she repeated passionately, "I know him through and through. He could not be so hateful as to have such a friendship. He could not be so sly as to keep it from me. Oh, why is father away? What am I to do?"

She read and re-read the letter, and unable to upset the grave impression of Lord Horsham's heavily inked words, and sick at heart, she postponed dinner, ordered a hansom and set off for

Horsham House. Her long drive was in vain. His lordship was at a ministerial dinner. Mr. West had left. She asked despairingly for Lord Billinghurst. His lordship was away from home. More than once she had been tempted to seek some relatives in Queen's Gate, but her nature was not weak enough to care for mere sympathy, and unless help was the result she thought it better to keep counsel.

As it was the secret had passed from her hands and it might yet be a reproach to her that she had not taken the hint to say nothing. Poor Daisy had a bad night, but morning brought one resolve and the courage to act on it.

Jack Raggleston's sturdy figure and confident bearing was always in the background of her resources and from hour to hour she felt more need of his cheering presence and short and ready methods. She would find him first thing and implore his help.

Directly after breakfast she sent him a note and waited with a nervous fear of further disappointment. But he did not fail her, and his red face was more welcome than the morning sun, now shining again on a drying world.

She sprang to meet him with shining eyes, and he, quite shocked to see her pale face, took both her hands in his. She withdrew them, ashamed of her impulsiveness, and they faced one another rather shyly, but Daisy thrust her letter upon him, exclaiming tremulously, "I sent for you to read this, Mr. Raggleston; I am at my wit's end. Oh, I am in such trouble; I fear Paul is a—a murderer"—and Daisy fairly wept, sitting down shaken with despairing sobs.

Raggleston, beside himself at the spectacle, had nearly taken her in his arms, and stammered eager denial and encouragement. She dried her eyes hurriedly, and besought him to read the letter at once.

Raggleston had postponed the evil moment time after time yesterday, but had carried through the interview with Bobby Vane with the recklessness of the hopelessly lost, and this morning he had come round foreseeing, if not prepared for, full confession, and gloomily doubtful of absolution in spite of the bracing effect his approach had had on Daisy. But Lord Horsham's letter fairly petrified him.

Having read it through he gazed at it speech-

lessly, then held it upside down and looked at it that way; picked up the envelope and studied that, and finally remarked pleasantly, handing it back, "He writes a good fist, doesn't he?"

Daisy looked at him as if she thought he was going mad.

"I didn't depend on you for an opinion of Lord Horsham's handwriting, Mr. Raggleston," she said breathing fast. "This wretch, Beauclerk, whom I was silly enough to identify with Paul, has plainly betrayed him, or has deceived Lord Horsham. If you have an opinion on that —or any advice or suggestion to offer—"

Raggleston sat down heavily on a couch and took his head in his hands, and said nothing for at least a minute.

Daisy, rigid, holding the letter in both hands, stood and beheld him.

He looked up presently, away from Daisy, and said without emotion of any kind, "Lord Horsham is the biggest ass in Christendom, and I am the biggest brute." He went on steadily—

"I know nothing of Beauclerk, though if he exists he is a liar, as I told young Adair yesterday. But you were probably right in thinking that he

is only your brother playing the fool. But if I hadn't been a cad and a cowardly idiot, I could have relieved your mind yesterday about your brother. He is absolutely innocent of this business. He didn't touch Von Deggendorf."

"Von Deggendorf!" cried Daisy.

"Yes, Miss Heimer's friend. You can guess why I cut up so rough when she asked about him."

"Then he was the man found injured in the Park. Oh, Mr. Raggleston, but how in the world do you know? And what has Paul to do with this?"

"How your brother has come to be accused or even suspected I cannot imagine. Short of that, I know everything. None better."

The old black look settled on his burnt face, and he thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and walked to the window, turning his back on her.

"It was I who fought with Von Deggendorf last night."

She gave a little gasp of horror and pity, and then ran to him and put her arm through his. "Oh, I am so sorry for you," she cried. He

turned quickly, and took her hands in a grasp she felt for some days afterwards.

"I thought you would have fired me out of the house," he said huskily. "How can you have any sympathy for such a brute?"

"Tell me all about it," she said.

He told her the whole tale, all that Paul had seen of it, and a good deal more, smiting his thick head more than once, and abusing himself in unmeasured terms.

But his vehemence was chiefly directed against any possible lingering belief in Daisy's mind that affection for Miss Heimer could have been his motive, and she had hard work not to smile at his eagerness for a clear path rather than a clean record. Even now it was the hampering consequences rather than the wrongful acts that lent ardour to his self condemnation.

She thought the moment inopportune for further admonition. She was too genuinely stirred and sorry. But her sense of justice was strong and she was sorry for Miss Heimer, too.

"I must say you have begun your quest badly," she exclaimed, thinking of the rebuff he had administered. He muttered something inaudible

about the quest, and added more intelligibly that he never wished to set eyes on Miss Heimer again.

"Don't you think that yours is a dog-in-the-manger policy?" said she, "by hook or by crook—or other weapons—to deprive the poor thing of her admirers, and then—let her travel alone into the country?"

"Alone?" said Raggleston, with sarcasm.

"There was no Julius, no Lord Billinghurst, and when "maliciously" she had only you to fall back on—"

"I stood from under, eh? Never mind," he said with a sudden animation. "I'll fit another string to her bow—at once."

"Instead of playing Providence to Miss Heimer, you had better reflect how matters stand with yourself," advised Daisy.

Her anxiety about Paul removed, she had more leisure to consider Raggleston's case, and need not reprove herself for his domination of her thoughts; and yet she blushed to recognise it, and sought to end the interview. In the middle of a half-formed jobation for use on a future day, she sprang up and invited him to depart.

"But I owe you an invitation to lunch, so come back at one o'clock and we will form a plan of campaign. Don't think that I am 'firing you out,' but I have a thousand things to do."

"And I have one," said Raggleston, in high good humour again as she regretted to observe.

"Are you sure that it is nothing foolish?" she asked.

"The best thing a man could do," he replied, beaming on her.

Daisy's mind misgave her, perhaps prophetically. But they went their respective ways, and Daisy, acting from a suggestion of Raggleston's, ordered Paul's things to be packed. When she came back towards lunch time, to her chagrin the portmanteau was already gone. It had been called for, though not by him, but there was a letter from the runagate. It ran:—

MY DEAR DAISY:—

Guided by your advice

("guided by my advice?" cried the sister) *I have ceased to be a mere spectator of the motley scene, and have become an actor.*

("An actor," she repeated faintly.) *My life*

is at present full of incident, and should accident be avoided, we may yet hope to meet again. I recommend the bearer of this note to your kind reception. Lord Billinghurst is an amiable young man, capable of good manners when he thinks them desirable, and of an address perhaps even too insinuating to strangers. I have by him been introduced to a friend of yours, Mr. Raggleston.

("How did he know that?" exclaimed Daisy, in consternation. "The wretch will turn the tables on me.") *of whose manners I cannot speak so highly.*

("You're a finicking ape," said Daisy decisively), *but who seems to have good fighting qualities, which should help him in these days of foreign competition; and a confidence which knows no denial.*

(No comment by the reader.) *Should you have to do with a certain Lord Horsham, whose chief claims to forbearance are his paternity to Lord Billinghurst and his enlightened patronage of the drama, do not, without necessity, speak of your acquaintance with Mr. Beauclerk. You can hardly be said to know him, and you could not do justice to a young man whose development*

and conduct under trying conditions have been a bright feature in my existence these many arduous hours. I am leaving town today. Lord Billinghurst will give you details. I will address you from my rural retreat.

YOUR DEVOTED BROTHER.

(And then there was a postscript.)

More devoted than you wot of. Oh Daisy, you deceived! Think well of the deserving Beauclerk.

This was not illuminating, but it was reassuring. She kissed the postscript for Paul, but when Raggleston came she had left the letter upstairs. But "I am not to meet your friend Lord Billinghurst," she cried laughingly, descending.

"He's all right," said Raggleston. "I have just telegraphed to him."

"What?" she asked, "may I know?"

He looked at her with the most earnest sentiment.

"Only that I resigned the Quest to him. That's all."

"Luncheon, Miss," said the butler.

CHAPTER IX

SOCK OR BUSKIN

IN the later hours of the morning we see break on the market-carts in St. Martin's Fields, when Dawn returning on her silver wheels overtook Mr. Robert Vane's westering hansom, a young man of somewhat noticeable exterior issued from Long Acre upon Leicester Square and turned into the Post Office at the north-east corner. The long dark overcoat, fitted somewhat closely to the figure, and the deep band on the tall hat, gave confirmation to the mourning suggested by black trousers; but a note of incongruity lent by a pair of yellow washleather gloves and furthered by a big spotted silk tie pulled out voluminously from the neck and fluttering below the opening of the high cut coat, carried a suggestion of a person—per-

haps a personage—of foreign extraction. The moustache, too, turned up sharply at the ends, and the alert and somewhat defiant look in the eyes, one of them mounting a gold-rimmed glass, completed an impression less strange in Leicester Square than further West. The shadowy and shady figure of Roger la Honte would perhaps have crossed the vision on meeting him; but a second glance would have been wasted, for the figure had entered the Post Office. The distinguished foreigner bent over the telegraph forms. "Miss Arden, 70 Collingham Gardens," he wrote, and then paused and frowned and caressed his moustache for a considerable time. But the unfamiliar touch, or the inspection of his person as he looked downward, presently inspired him and he completed the missive—"Unavoidably detained by morning performance. Am writing. Paul." Strictly true, he said to himself, and as plausible as may be. He handed in his telegram and stepped out upon the street again and set his face towards Piccadilly and Arlington Street.

The day had turned grey and a slight drizzle had set in, altering the tones of the pavements,

though the roads were as yet scarcely affected. The cabmen on the rank were considering the question of mackintoshes, and the horses rested their nose-bags on the already shining cobbles, thoughtful of a disagreeable day's work. Paul had no umbrella, but he wore a coat, and the weather suited it. He was glad of the rain. When he had waked in the small, square, plainly furnished room of the hotel he had since vacated, to the hardness of its bed and the discomfort of his wraps, his first thought had been that he was in prison. His next, how to keep out of it. He had at once rejected his overnight notion of spending the daylight hours between the sheets. It would qualify him for an asylum, even if it saved him from a jail. He must be up and out. He must communicate with Daisy, if only for her sake; and he wanted clothes. And money—if he was to live the raffish life he had foreseen. And he must positively see Lord Billinghurst, and hear his news. He had considered his immediate necessities and rung for tea and a hot bath and for the Boots who had given him early entrance, who had seemed a useful sort of man and was moreover already in his pay. Boots had

arrived first and been charged with a commission to the nearest hosier. On his return Paul had been ready for his purchases. It had struck him more than once in the mirrored saloons of Bobby's clubs that his moustache or its twist lent him a foreign look, and one reveller had addressed him as *"Monseer."* He had not been slow to take the hint. The weak spot of his assumption was, that it drew attention rather than repelled it. His mask was a thin one, but then, much lay in the carriage. Had he been no actor by aptitude, taken no joy in his masquerade—had he not felt a Continental animus rising under his La Vallière foulard; a determined galalntry glaring through his glass on every woman; and an anglophobic bristle along his pursed mouth, the first acquaintance might have cried, "There goes Paul Arden in make-up!" But in his pride of port he even despised its adjuncts. "There go two men," he cried to himself; "I take them at random—both of a build; clad in the eternal black cloth; topped with the universal silk hat. One face is pierced for a briar pipe, and carries it, and there is an unrolled umbrella in the hand. The other face bears an amber cigarette tube

and the hand is supported on a silver headed stick. Not more than that the difference. Yet one walks West, the other East. They fit in different worlds. Of these English" (he had almost said Anglais) "a half goes with shaven cheeks and chin and a double tuft of hair on the upper lip; and an increasing moiety looks on the other through glass. I have but conformed. These things can neither give disguise nor help recognition. Where all men are spectacled and bearded the eye of acquaintance looks deeper. Let me feel the part and I may defy the detective."

As he entered Jermyn Street he vented an experimental *"sacré!"* on a fishmonger's boy, who, his attention on a dog fight, presented his tray for unnecessarily close inspection.

Whatever the appearance of the stranger frowning on him through his eyeglass, the boy had no doubt about the universal application of the English tongue, and in no uncertain accent threatened to break every pane of glass in his face. Mr. Beauclerk dropped his end of the altercation and walked on flourishing his cane, but he reflected as he went on the incomplete

civilisation which permits the survival of barbaric pleasantries on one form of bodily infirmity, while forbidding them on others.

No doubt the tradesman's boy would have delivered some equally paralysing thrust at any wooden-legged or scorbutic street goer whose evil star had led him against the tray. But whereas the fishmonger's clients would hold it in bad taste to chaff an acquaintance on a malformation, and would probably refrain from comment on other blemishes, the myope, child and man, is fair game. Something of the ill repute of the hunchback clings to him, whose sidelong glance is imputed to malice.

The contained vision of the shortsighted brings accusation of conceit, moroseness and self-centred narrowness. The soul looks out of the windows of its house, and Nature, that erratic workman, has scamped those essentials, and they give on to fog and distortion instead of that fair prospect of earth and sky, the "ancient lights" of the dwelling. The glazed eye which takes the last dear impression, ere the owner expires under the fiat of the romancer, purges the emotions with pity. But the framed and glazed eye!

Be it moved with whatsoever emotion, it raises but one in the breast of the spectator.

Mr. Beauclerk breathed on his insulted monocle, polished it, cocked it, and crossed St. James's Street and re-trod the familiar flagstones leading to Horsham House. He crossed the court-yard, ascended the steps, rang the bell and asked for Lord Billinghurst. The footman was doubtful. He thought his lordship was out, but would inquire. What name?

"Mr. Beauclerk," said Paul, and, seeing the meeting in his mind's eye, had an inward smile. It was premature. He was shown across the shrouded hall, which looked no cheerfuller in the daytime, and into the library, which, on the contrary, looked pleasant enough in the morning light, with its three long windows on the Green Park.

Left to himself, he looked round him curiously; appraised the rows of mellow bindings, met Lord Chatham's marble frown, and strolling down the room saw at once, above the fireplace, the old-fashioned silver mounted "epées" he had carried under his coat the night before. The white arm had favoured the fortunes of Raggleston, and

his blade was restored to its supports, but its pair, which had lost a third of its steel, had proved too short to extend across the nails and had been laid hastily upon the chimneypiece. He must have Billinghurst's account of the flight through the house and of the homecoming of the Marquis.

The room was very quiet.

He heard no sounds about the house. The gilt clock ticked somewhat solemnly, and his heel cracked loudly on the parquet, edging the book-presses, when he stepped off the carpet.

He was beginning to feel the effects of the last twelve hours in a slight feverishness and a tension of the nerves. He had had but little sleep, and the subsiding unrest after the storm of incident inclined him presently to sink into an armchair by the hearth, where a small fire made a flicker of protest against the grey day.

He took up a novel from a work-table at his elbow and opened it idly. He looked at the name of the authoress, then laid it down and picked up a book lying by it. On the flyleaf of this was written "Maud Sefton," and a date.

The name took his imagination, and he re-

peated it to himself sleepily, harking at the same time after the name of the heiress, which had escaped him. Though he put down the book and closed his eyes he saw "Maud Sefton" before them. The stillness of the room was a low-roaring vacuum in his ears. The cinder falling from the grate fell with a crash on his jarred sensories. Dark flashes of unconsciousness, winks of sleep, descended on him and withdrew with the lightning rapidity of a nicitating membrane. His head fell forward. Then a door banged without, and he came to his feet at a bound. A heavy step was crossing the hall.

He ran his hand rapidly over his tie and his face. "Pray Heaven it isn't the Marquis," he thought, with a sudden fear. Ill luck is always ready to take a suggestion, confounded jade that she is. The door opened and Lord Horsham appeared.

Paul bowed and for a moment felt worse than he had felt yet. The Marquis seemed more annoyed than surprised, but paused perceptibly with a raised eyebrow before he shut the door behind him. Paul felt that he was in the presence of a man capable of taking his measure, and his

polite apology had, he was conscious, a nervous inflection. He had called to see Lord Billinghurst.

The Marquis looked at him once and looked at him twice, but showed no trace of his conclusion —if he had arrived at one.

"I see," he said briefly. Then, more pleasantly, "And what is your name?"

"My name is Beauclerk," replied Paul intrepidly.

"Are you one of what'shisname's family, then? St. Albans'?"

"We are the French branch," said Paul, feeling rather faint, and acknowledging too late, the wisdom of the late Major Pendennis's advice to young men, to study the Peerage.

"Didn't know there was one," said his lordship, crossing to his desk. "Sit down, Mr. Beauclerk. Though I don't think you'll see my son this morning. *I* can't set eyes on him. But I dare say you know his movements better than I do."

Paul did not sit down, but stood ready for instant flight on the return of the footman. Lord Horsham sat himself in his desk-chair and looked

over his papers; a hard-featured man, shaven and cropped, with a sarcastic lip. He took up a pair of gold spectacles off the blotter, put them on, pulled them off again, and wheeled round on the visitor.

"Are you a friend of Billinghurst's—of my son's?"

"An acquaintance," corrected Paul.

"May I ask when you saw him last?"

Paul knew that he must keep his head and show no symptoms of prevarication. "Last night," he said readily, and with great show of exactness, "at half past eleven I met him in the street."

"And was he alone?"

He had been alone.

"And was he going home?"

He had his back to home," said Paul cautiously.

The Marquis appeared at a loss. "You are sure it was so late?"

Paul was sure. Lord Horsham sat and frowned, looking hard at Paul, who dangled his eyeglass and preserved a courteous deference.

"Mr. Beauclerk, you will wonder why I put

these questions. I will tell you, but please let it go no further."

Paul murmured his assurances.

"Pray sit down."

Paul sat down and gave a sympathetic attention, cursing the footman in his heart.

"I happened to come home last night across the Park"—he waved his hand towards the window—"by a path I sometimes take after a late sitting, when I can find anyone to open the gate—and to my horror I came upon a gentleman known to me, a certain Freiherr von Deggendorf, a young German, lying on the grass badly injured. Some scoundrels made off at our approach—an inspector was with me—and one of them—impudent scoundrel!" cried the Marquis, smiting his fist on the arm of his chair, "who waved his hat to me as he ran—I nearly caught —" ("Oh, come," thought Paul)—

"But he got clear off. They all did—"

"Tut, tut," said Mr. Beauclerk.

"We took the poor lad to the Embassy—"

"I should have advised St. George's Hospital," said Mr. Beauclerk.

The Marquis looked angry. He had not asked

for advice—"where he lies in a critical condition," he continued in a louder voice—"I come home to find the house shut in spite of my orders—not that that need concern us now—but these windows open. Fortunately, you may say. But extraordinarily. And this morning I find"—he rose from his chair and walked down the room—"this broken foil." He held it up. "I smell mischief, Mr. Beauclerk. There has been some stupid, dangerous tomfoolery. My son left home early this morning—"

Mr. Beauclerk was genuinely astonished—"with a bag."

And genuinely concerned. How to find him?—"As the footman would have told you if he hadn't been a confounded idiot."

Mr. Beauclerk showed a genuine concurrence—"But it has given me the chance of speaking to you, which I don't regret—for perhaps you may be able to make my son listen to reason; young people, Mr. Beauclerk, will listen to anyone sooner than to their parents. Von Deggendorf won't open his mouth—or can't. But we have one piece of evidence."

Now for it, thought Paul, and braced himself.

"They found a card on the unfortunate fellow when he was undressed; and not only that—"

At this moment there was an interruption. A caller who could not be denied. Lord Horsham left the room, begging Mr. Beauclerk to excuse him and await his return, for he had yet something to say.

The footman remained to explain that Lord Billinghurst had left the house even as the Marquis had said.

"You don't know his address by any chance?" asked Paul.

The footman looked at him shrewdly. For a moment each dropped his mask.

"I might be able to get a note to him, sir," he said. An understanding was created without more words. The man took a sheet of paper from the Marquis's desk, and Paul wrote "Meet me tonight"—there was no time for planning anything—"at the Cafè Royal—The Man in the street." Valuable consideration passed, and the simple contract over, the footman vanished ghostlike.

Paul found himself repeating the last words of the Marquis before he had been cut short in

his speech, "And not only that—" What then? The Freiherr was staunch, like a good man and true. He had said so. What then? Nothing that concerned himself surely.

Had he left other trace—that nefarious midnight Arden, now no more, who had helped to murder a man, and mocked a Minister of State who sought to interpose?

And then his remembrance was sharply jogged, and even as he clutched at his breast pocket he saw his own pocketbook lying on the top of the desk.

He snatched it up and made conviction certainty. No doubt when he had given the German his card the night before, he had left the case on the table. There was no great harm done, though, for there was nothing in it but some more cards, and a scribble from Molly Vane, giving the hour for a rehearsal. Still, it connected him with the house. There was the rub. The man Arden whose card was on the body had, plainly, been in Horsham House, and so probably, had the Freiherr; and naturally Billinghurst, too, for someone must have received them. 'Twas ever thus, he reflected, much cast down.

One long rope walk from the crime to the gallows. One twists the cord all the way. He searched the case for further evidence, but he had found enough. He had Molly's note in his hand when the door opened again, and the Marquis was back. Paul looked up.

The cold hand of Fate took him by the nape. He had made another false step, and was half way down the rope-walk already. What was Beauclerk doing with Arden's property in his hand? Should he pocket it or put it down?

Lord Horsham's eye fixed it; turned to his desk; came back to the letter-case; then held Paul's. His mouth was wreathed with unpleasantness and an ominous silence fell.

"Is your name Arden?" inquired his lordship with smooth irony.

He doesn't suspect that it is, thought Paul, and took breath. "Mr. Arden—I must confess it—is a great friend of mine," he said hardily.

"Does he allow you to read his letters?" asked his Lordship, eye on the note.

Paul said nothing, for he had nothing to say. Silence fell again.

"I can allow no one to take a document from

my desk. Mr. Beauclerk, you make me regret my confidence."

He gave each word its weight, and his hearer was terribly gravelled.

"I tell you plainly, I do not admire your presentment of yourself. You say you are French, and your dress bears you out—remarkably." He dwelt on it. "Yet your English is as good as mine. You hear my story with a show of surprise and sympathy, yet you now own yourself hand in glove with a man whom we have reason to believe a felon. You claim kinship with a good family. How shall I reconcile your claim with your action?"

He looked at the case, then held out his hand for it, and the owner yielded it up. But not in abasement of spirit. He was seething with rage against the unmerited ignominy heaped upon him, but the reproaches had their reflex effect. Why scruple to romance when you are regarded as a liar of magnitude? His mind began to work like a mill. He would not be held an impostor for nothing. He refused with set teeth to be first trapped, and then bullied into confession. A nice figure he would make, stripped

and turned inside out—he, Paul Arden. By the Lord, never!

"I must press you for an answer," the Marquis was saying. Paul's invention was working at full pressure.

"I don't want to threaten." He waited for an explanation, but it was not quite ready. He put his hand on the bell.

"I fear I am wasting your time, Mr. Beauclerk," he said grimly.

Mr. Beauclerk started from his reflections, took his hand from his chin, and put his hat down on the table like a man who had come to a decision.

"My lord," he said, "your suspicions are natural. And even just. I do not think that I have so far verbally deceived you, but I have undoubtedly been acting a part." Lord Horsham took his hand from the bell and his face had something approaching a smile. "You have drawn from this unfortunate incident an inference I cannot endure. For, in a word, it was a communication from my unhappy friend Paul Arden—an urgent communication—that brought

me here this morning in search of that very case you hold in your hand."

"Ha!" said the Marquis.

"My instructions were to recover the case, or at worst to see that it contained nothing compromising. I may tell you this without prejudice to his interests, for I find nothing in it of consequence. Unless someone has been beforehand with me—"

"Let me hear this story fully," said the Marquis, not to be drawn; and the impenitent proprietor was secretly entertained. "And who is this Arden, and what is his pocketbook doing here?"

"Lord Horsham, just now you regretted your confidence in me. I will show full confidence in you."

Lord Horsham thrust out his lip. Rather rudely, Paul thought. But he continued:

"Paul Arden I have known all my life. Originally a young man of good abilities and—and appearance, a good home and a sister who had an excellent and restraining influence on him, he fell a prey to idleness. The root of all evil, as we are told. A habit of recklessness brought

him among violent and unprincipled companions —whose station in life was higher than his own. But it were vain to look to such for guidance—" Mr. Beauclerk looked more sad than severe, but Lord Horsham cleared his throat rather nervously—"and last night's work has sent him an outcast and disguised felon from the haunts of his childhood into scenes and places I tremble to picture."

The Marquis looked at the clock. This is a very intolerable young man, he thought, but I had better let him tell his story in his own way. If I can get at the truth I shall not think it wasted time. Aloud he said:

"I wish my son could hear your moving recital, Sir."

"I wish he could," replied Mr. Beauclerk with unction. "It should be a lesson to any young man. It will always be one to me." He pursued: "Last night a quarrel arose over the winecup—in your house."

"I knew it," said the Marquis triumphantly.

"This Arden and the unfortunate gentleman you describe as lying at his Embassy in a critical state—I think it would have been wiser to take

him to the hospital—had high words. Arden, like myself, had lived much abroad, and was in sympathy with the punctilious code of honour now extinct in England. Your swords were only too handy—" and he spread his palms.

"And my son permitted this?"

"Lord Billinghurst behaved well. Fresh from the courts, he advised that the *jus gladii* was in the hands of the Law, and that a duel implied *malitia praecogitata* or *malice prepense*—"

"Well, well. Never mind him," said the parent impatiently.

"The duel was fought in the Park. The trees screened from observation, the silent turf deadened—"

"Spare me the scenery, Mr. Beauclerk," cried the Marquis in irritation. "What happened? What is this broken sword?"

Mr. Beauclerk proceeded coldly, his imagination flying off at a tangent after the flying point: "At the first encounter Arden's sword snapped. Snatching up the point, and wrapping his hand in his handkerchief—he was ever a theatre-goer," said Mr. Beauclerk in parentheses, forestalling an objection—"he professed himself ready to

fight on. He was always full of a fiery gallantry, *ce cher* Paul—"

"You are poetical, Sir, but this is a matter for the Police Gazette."

"I know it, I know it." He paused, mournful. "At the next encounter he dashed aside his opponent's guard and plunged his point into his breast. He fell. You came. And Arden, you say, mocked you as he ran. Alas! So gallant and gay! Gallant and gay!" Mr. Beauclerk buried his face in his hands.

In amazed rage the Marquis sat and waited. Perhaps the emotion was natural. If real?

"And what was it all about?" he asked.

Mr. Beauclerk sat up. "A woman," he said wearily. "Though I know nothing of her but her name."

"And that was?"

"Maud Sefton." And how the name came into his head the romancer had no notion. It belonged to no one he knew. Mr. Beauclerk sat gazing darkly on the immediate past, in the droop of profound dejection. When he looked at his inquisitor again he was surprised to see the change in his face. It was flushed with

anger, and his lips worked as if he thought verbally—perhaps addressing vigorous remonstrance to Mr. Arden or Lord Billinghurst. He looked sternly on his visitor, but his severity was diverted from him.

"And how did you learn all this, Mr. Beauclerk?"

"From Paul Arden."

"You have seen him since? You know where he is?"

"Last night, after midnight, he was with me, and I knew all. Half an hour later he disappeared. My Lord, I can assure you that if you left this room now you would search London for him in vain."

"Gone abroad, hey?"

"Naturally the German cannot speak. A lady's name is involved. He would feel that he has half the blame to bear, and probably fears to bring trouble on your house."

The Marquis rose and turned his back, looking over his desk, and Mr. Beauclerk held his shoulders slightly raised until he faced round again.

"This has been a curious and unexpected interview for me, Mr. Beauclerk. I am grateful

for the information I have obtained from you. Here is your friend's pocketbook, but if you take my advice you will hold your tongue about the whole matter. For remember—" severely and impressively—"if this young man dies the issue will be grave. You will leave me your address."

Mr. Beauclerk wrote down an address of the best, picked up his hat, pressed the Marquis's proffered hand, and made his exit in good style in spite of an inward conviction that the sooner Mr. Beauclerk followed Paul Arden into the *Ewigkeit,* the better.

Lord Horsham, left alone, stood in his library in thought. "A most extraordinary youth, that," he said to himself. "And yet he wore his eyeglass like a gentleman, as D'Israeli said of some one." Arrears of business and morning messengers recalled him to public affairs.

CHAPTER X

AN UNDERSTUDY

PAUL saw a good deal of London that afternoon. He fled East and roamed the Strand, easier among the more variegated crowd; explored the paved courts and followed the footways of the lawyers, under dark arches and into quiet gardens, and sat on secluded seats that never rested them. The grubby windows of the law-stationers and wigmakers appealed to him, a foreigner, in Dickens-land.

Up the muddy gut of Chancery Lane, along teeming Holborn or dreary Gray's Inn Road, purposeless, but interested, in philosophic detachment of mind from past or future, he flattened his nose against the windows of the instrument-makers, the machinists, the scientific-toy mer-

chants, collectors' jumble shops and second hand book stores with the magpie avidity of the amateur whose interests have never been thinned out, but choke each other in a mass of weedy growth; for whom the world always remains a toy-shop and never becomes a work-shop, and to whom the workman's tools are attractive shining things though their very uses are unknown.

He lingered absorbed outside the booksellers, searching the close-packed ranks of rubbed and worn backs behind the steamed glass, or lifting the spread coverings took up volume after volume from exposed and unassorted piles, dabbling eagerly in the shallows of a dozen seas of knowledge.

Wet with the persistent drizzle, he made his way back to the picture galleries and plunged into the study of Dutch and Italian schools. Half a mile of masters made him a surfeit. Not understood is not assimilated and he soon got indigestion.

He dropped onto a circular divan with a short padded pillar rising from its centre. The perverse properties of this really astonishing piece of furniture are well exhibited on wet days when

the galleries are in general use. It has been supposed that the ingenious author of "Flatland" found it in vogue amongst the wedge-shaped inhabitants of the Plane; that he furnished the simple ground-plan from which an elevation was made by the architect of the National gallery, and that so a seat was constructed that provides sitting room for a dozen and back-rest for four. Humanity, unable to accommodate itself round the core, like the clustering quarters of an orange, fights endlessly on the verge. Overlapping neighbours, constrained by the natural forces at play, ousted him at length, and he tried a different couch. A rapt and angular lady, focussing a high-set picture, backed onto his feet and sat down on him abruptly.

He retired in dudgeon and sought the smoking room of a quiet hotel, and here, in a broken-springed armchair, in the mirk and stuffiness strained through filtering wire-gauze, black with smuts and humming with flies, he soon touched the Nadir of existence.

He contemplated a life on such terms. For ever arriving and departing, the tenant from night to night of a single room, one's luggage one's sole

earthly tie. Flattered to be spoken to by name, proud of a week's superiority of tenure over newcomers, clinging to small privileges—the table in the corner, one's umbrella in the manager's office. Reading the publications spread by unknown hands in hotel sitting rooms. "The Railway Journal," "The Guide to Health," "The Hot Springs of Milwaukee," "The Innkeeper's Intelligencer," and the "Continental Bradshaw." Fitful converse with the floating population, the driftweed of society.

"If this young man dies the issue will be grave." I wonder how Raggleston feels, he mused. I've been devilish good to Raggleston. He thought of Daisy, and wondered if Bobby Vane had blundered on a truth. Poor Bobby. He had his troubles, too, then. Anyway, he resolved, I shall tell Daisy it was all for her sake. But no more of this romancing. No more, no more of that.

He slid into an uneasy slumber at last, and his dual personality played havoc through his dreams, and kept his half stilled faculties on the go until he awoke wholly, and found the street lamp outside lighting the yellowed wall of the

room. "If this young man dies, the grave will be the issue," he found himself saying solemnly. He looked at his watch. It was time for dinner. Then he might go straight to his rendezvous and dine while he was waiting for Billinghurst.

It was still wet, but evening had drawn the blind, and a hundred small street fires shone kindly on the lamp-posts, and the white moons of the arc-lights on the Haymarket lit files of quivering hansoms taking their corners on the one wheel, the drivers' streaming water-proofs, dashed with radiance, pennon-like following the curves. Newsboys with hoarse iteration and damp placard hung round the theatre fronts, and the long queues for pit and gallery pressed close and black against the walls, and turned to the traffic lines of faces splashed with light and wet.

The omnibus, whose painters colour it for evening effects, now lent its disparted image to the wet surfaces, and well supported by the public, rumbled in its dozens over the wood, dropping red and yellow reflections among the warm prevailing browns.

Paul contributed a penny to one which was still collecting, and was trundled to the Circus.

You may dine in many rooms and styles at the Cafè Royal. He chose the room and style chiefly affected by his adopted compatriots, entering the Cafè itself, filled with red velvet banquettes and marble topped tables and walled entirely with huge mirrors very confusing to the vision about supper time.

Heads fresh from the *tondeur* rose from flowing napkins, looking, from the front at least, as if the barber were still expected rather than the waiter, and the salad bowl and yard of bread by every plate savoured pleasantly of France.

Here he could see Billinghurst when and if he came, could stop and smoke at his leisure, and first and foremost dine. He set about it and ate with a good appetite, but he had finished his coffee before the third refugee came in.

Lord Billinghurst looked round him for a minute or more. The place was rather crowded, but Paul had been spreading himself over two seats latterly, and as soon as Billinghurst looked his way, he moved up, making place, and hung his hat on a peg. Billinghurst, not seeing his man, walked slowly across the room to the place

made, and edged in behind the table, looking round with compressed mouth upon the assembled foreigners. Paul watched him out of the corner of his eye. The pinch of apprehension marked his face and a nervousness was visible in his drumming fingers. The waiter was upon him at once, and he gave his order, and when he had had the first sip and was leaning back, his shoulders almost touching him, Paul said in his ear: "What did you do with the body?"

When you have hugged a dreadful secret for four and twenty hours, a pressing something known only to you and your dispersed accomplices, and a stranger in a public place leans his shadow across you and plucks the heart out of your concealed trouble, you may well suppose, as did the unfortunate and unhardened young nobleman, that the unexpected voice breaking into your privacy comes from a disordered imagination.

He started violently, paled, shut his eyes tight and opened them again, then, unable to discredit his hearing, turned his fearful gaze on his neighbour, whom he found laughing silently with lifted shoulders.

Indignation brought back his colour, and relief followed with a rush; for, having Arden constantly in mind, he recognized him; and in the elation of discovery and the upset of his feelings, he pounded him with his clenched fist.

"Quietly, mind the glasses," said Paul, glancing round them.

"D—n you," said his lordship. "What do you mean by it? And how did you come by that moustache? Surely you had none last night. I—I—" he looked at the general impression—"I took you for one of these forsaken foreigners."

"You forget," replied the mask, "that the hounds of justice are on my traces. When I parted from you last night it was because I remembered that the Freiherr had my card in his pocket. I was too late to recover it—I was chased—past the house, and have been fleeing ever since."

"I left the windows open for you," cried Lord Billinghurst, "but as for me, hearing my father's voice outside, I went to bed and locked myself in."

"And Raggleston?"

"Oh, he's all right," said Lord Billinghurst,

his face falling slightly. "I let him out by the front. It was all his fault, and of course he suffers least. And he's probably off by now to the Isle of Wight after that girl. He's a harsh sort of person."

"Did he say anything to the point?"

"The last thing he said to me was, 'he's only a German anyway.'"

Paul laughed. "Where does he live?" he asked.

"In term time he has diggings down in Earl's Court."

"Oh," said Paul, "has he?"—and after a pause —"And you? You have a faithful retainer at your house."

Lord Billinghurst winked. "I'm merely staying with an Aunt of mine in Chelsea. I retire there when the times are out of joint. She's not on speaking terms with my father, so it's rather useful. She's a pro-Boer," he explained, settling down to a cigar. "I don't mind her politics. It don't matter much in a woman. But have you noticed how all these pro- and anti- people catch one another's itch? My Aunt was only a Nonconformist once. Now she's an anti-vaccinator,

and an anti-vivisectionist, a total prohibitionist, a Protectionist, and a Propagator of something—Purity, I think. Not of her species anyway. Sometimes I call her Aunty and sometimes I call her pro. That's my little joke. But the value of it is that my father never sets foot there, so I'm as safe as houses. If the police came after me she would probably turn Passive Resister on the spot. All the same I had a letter this evening that will require an answer. But what became of you?"

Arden gave him a full account of his doings during the night and day, not forgetting the interview at Horsham House. The tale did not lose in the telling, and Lord Billinghurst was inexpressibly cheered by the resourcefulness of his fellow criminal and awakened to issues and possibilities that had never hitherto presented themselves to his mind. He was relieved rather than annoyed to learn that Lord Horsham had been made aware of his part in the matter, for it saved him the unpleasantness of an inevitable confession, but that Raggleston should have been cut loose from the coil and given an unembarrassed

hand to play, he found "a bit thick," as he expressed it.

"It may have been his fault originally," said Paul, "but not in the end."

But Billinghurst thought he should have had a lesson.

"As it is, if he only remembers to keep his mouth shut, and poor von Deggendorf goes on forgetting how to open his, in English anyway—"

"He may get his lesson yet," said Paul darkly, mindful of Lord Horsham's parting words, but Billinghurst, knowing his friend's capacity for muddling through, said "Pooh! He's an undefeated sort of chap and he'll come out on the top yet, you'll see. And marry his heiress."

As to that, Paul rather hoped that he might, but he had his doubts.

"Did you say anything about Miss Heimer?" asked Billinghurst with some anxiety.

"No. I couldn't remember her name. I said they quarreled about a woman. It's reassuring that it's to be kept quiet for the present," he added.

"Yes. But they're hot foot on your trail—or at least on the herring you have drawn. Look

here—" He produced his father's letter which bore date that afternoon, shortly after Paul's departure in fact. "He says—*your disgraceful conduct*—hm—hm—*Why I should have a son who*—hm—that's not it. Here we are—*I shall spare no pains to unearth this young scoundrel Arden, as I told your friend Beauclerk. Why you mix yourself up with such*—hm—hm—"

"Don't mind me," said Paul. "I told him that Arden had been led astray by a debauched aristocracy. It has evidently rankled."

Lord Billinghurst continued to read extracts. *"I have already sent West, who has undertaken the inquiry for me, to the addresses found and if he has reason to think that this Arden has gone abroad, as his friend hinted, I shall be much tempted to send the case to Scotland Yard at once."* "West is his secretary. A sound man. You'll have to lie close."

"I told you," said Paul, "I had to look out for myself. And this brings us to the question of means and methods. If you can fortify yourself in Chelsea from personal cross-examination, and at worst deny all knowledge of Beauclerk, we may throw them off for a time; of course if Von

Deggendorf is so—so disobliging as to—to—" He did not finish but his companion understood. That event was never far from their thoughts.

"But I must have some clothes and some sinews of war, and I must set my sister's mind at rest. If you could help me in that—"

"I'll go and see her," volunteered Billinghurst, with alacrity. "I'll go and see her."

"They may be watching the house—"

"I'll take a bag with me, and bring it away full of your duds."

"You're coming on," said Paul, approvingly. "I'll arm you with a note—"

"Anything I can do I will. I got you into this scrape and I must help you out of it."

"Thank you. We must hang together. Heaven forfend! I don't mean that! But I'll write to my sister and tell her she may trust you—"

"Thank *you*," said Billinghurst, "and you must meet me again tomorrow as early as you can."

He called for writing material and began his *apologia* to Daisy. Lord Billinghurst gnawed his fingers and exercised himself in mental strategy. Presently he cried "I have it! A great scheme. Listen, Arden." Paul put down his pen.

"You shall go and stay with my sister in Sussex. Give me a piece of that paper and while you write to your sister I'll write to mine."

Paul looked dubious. "It sounds very well for *me*," he said.

"She'll be delighted to have you. She's all alone down there."

"But—"

"And I imagine that my father won't be leaving town at present; he's too full of work. You shall go down to Burton Paddocks, our house in Sussex. They won't look for you there," he chuckled. "I'll write and tell her you're under a cloud—"

"For pity's sake, no," remonstrated Paul. "If I am to go let me tell my own tale. But I don't think it is feasible—or fair on her."

"Look here, my dear fellow, we have a big place down there which we can't afford to keep up, but my sister loves it, and never stays long away from it. I go down pretty often, and generally take some man with me, and I'll come down this week-end and look after you. It will be pretty dull, but no worse than Holloway. You can shoot rabbits and there is some unexciting

fishing in the lake. We have another Aunt of Sorts down there, a Permanent Installation, who is never surprised at anything I do, and there you can live occult from mortal eyes, until things happen. If you don't go, Raggleston will before he's much older."

"But your people know him," objected Paul.

"There you have the advantage of him," answered Billinghurst, promptly.

The prospect seemed fair, and he was at length overruled.

"And now is there anything more to be done for you?"

Paul told him about his theatricals which were giving him not a little uneasiness. He was due at rehearsal on the Friday and the performance itself was not far off. It was obviously impossible for him to attend. The Marquis had even the name of the piece in his possession, along with Molly's address. But it would cause great inconvenience, and we need hardly say that Paul saw no possibility of an effective substitute. As was said of a famous diplomat, he might be succeeded in office but not replaced. But Lord Billinghurst, greatly daring, proffered himself. He

could act. Loved it. He would attend the rehearsal, say that Arden was ill, and had sent him as understudy. Paul should coach him in the part at Burton Paddocks, lend him his word book at once, and worry no more about it.

Paul felt that his hand was being played for him with a vengeance. But there was no help for it. He had left the mimic stage for the real—must release the shadow for the substance. It jumped well with his necessities, in the circumstances, and Burton Paddocks sounded pleasanter than the Covent Garden Hotel and the anathemas of the Surwood Thespians. But perhaps to hide from the Marquis in his own house was the perilous lure that drew him.

He consented to the plan at length, not without misgivings, and both letters were written. It was agreed that Paul should continue the name of Beauclerk, lest that of Arden should become unpleasantly notorious; that Billinghurst should keep him posted in the development of the Marquis's hostilities, and pending more serious events, should attend the next rehearsal to read Paul's part and make what way he could in the graces of the company. To Paul this appeared

the blackest quarter of the horizon—to Billinghurst the only gleam of brightness; who, indeed, would have had the moustache and eyeglass off the discountenanced Beauclerk before he left his side. But to that Paul would by no means consent. He instructed his understudy where duplicates could be obtained and with this his lordship had to rest content.

It was late before they left the Café, Billinghurst posting his letter and pocketing Paul's. "Adoo, Beauclerk," shouted Lord Billinghurst, from his cab. "Bon soir, Milor," replied Mr. Beauclerk, with a flourish of his hat, and vanished eastward through the colonnade.

Next day proved fair, and Paul waited impatiently enough for his ally, confined all the sunny morning in the small hotel he had returned to for the night. He arrived at last, and while Paul exchanged his travesty for country clothes, gave an account of his mission. Daisy had been out. Waiting had not produced her. But the household had not appeared at a standstill on Paul's account, and when Billinghurst had diplomatically approached the subject of his quest, the butler had brought Paul's portmanteau, packed and

waiting for him, from below. Miss Arden had ordered Mr. Paul's things to be packed, thinking he would want them.

"That's what I call a sister!" cried Billinghurst, in conclusion. "I am sorry I missed her."

Paul thought it was altogether too considerate; superficially. Truth to tell he was puzzled. Yet what could she know? he asked himself.

Lord Billinghurst drove to Victoria with him. "You will probable be arrested as you step into the train," he said. "They always are. And I want to see it."

Paul primed him with particulars as to the part he was to play at Surwood, and recommended Bobby as a possible instrument, and source of unexpected news. Billinghurst lent a ready ear, standing outside the carriage door, admiring the poise of the monocle confronting him, and looking to see the animating eye droop and quail when the old familiar "I am Hawkshaw, the detective," should sound across his shoulder. The engine had whistled when Paul remembered that he did not know the name of his involuntary hostess.

"By the by," he said, leaning out of the

window as the train moved off. "You never told me your sister's name."

"Oh—Sefton—Maud Sefton," said Lord Billinghurst.

Paul looked so blank that the other walked alongside and repeated "Maud—Maud Sefton."

Paul nodded, smiled and sat down.

"The Devil!" he said to himself.

CHAPTER XI

A PROVINCIAL TOUR

WEST Steadham, where Paul alighted towards four o'clock in the afternoon, is one of those little country-side stations so attractive at once and of themselves, that further excursion, beyond the ticket collector's archway, seems unnecessary, and even hazardous of disappointment.

Standing high, its smooth asphalt sidewalks look across gently heaving deeps of foliage and lightly ruffled shallows of corn southward to the steady downs where travelling clouds train all day their mile-long shadows.

Its low palings painted dazzlingly white, its disciplined borders of wallflower and marigold, and its rustic benches of comfortable incline, suggest infrequent trains and the peaceful converse

of village worthies assembled of an evening to see the down express come by under the quivering plank bridgeway like a comet through a keyhole.

But Paul had not hitched his waggon to a star. His train was what they do not hesitate to call an omnibus, across the Channel. It lay leviathan-like along the track for some minutes, so much larger than West Steadham that having dropped its passenger from the foremost end it must move quite appreciably further on its way south before it could discharge his portmanteau from the other. Gathering its coils by a long communicated series of jerks it wound away down the shining metals.

The visitor for Burton Paddocks was received with all respect by the station-master, who might, indeed, have been designated the lodge-keeper, and was presently seen off in the West Steadham fly by the official and his family.

He found he had a four-mile drive before him, and ruminated deeply as he went.

He had wanted to re-appear as Paul Arden, but since his deplorable introduction of Lady Maud's name into the imbroglio had come home

to him, he had had to bring a fresh mind to bear on his proposal to make her a confidante. He must take her measure cautiously. Perhaps it would be better to remain Beauclerk, but here in this searching country sunlight and unsophisticated surrounding, how could be continue his moustache? It must come off; but when? In the train he had not been alone. The driver of the fly turned occasionally to refresh his eyes with a sight of his fare, under cover of a word of gossip or topography. Yet once at the house he was committed.

They were crossing a wide common, yellow with gorse, and purple with heather. A thin belt of firs beyond and on the right, ended at a knoll bearing a windmill whirling its noiseless arms, and through the trees and behind the turning fans the downs showed interminably. The common past the road was suddenly shaded and they ran for a little under an ill repaired stone wall which next gave way to a close paling, grey with lichen, sometimes bulging outwards under the thrust of a thick-twisted thorn, sometimes supplanted for a couple of yards by the bulging knees of a patriarchal oak. The fly,

hammering steadily along the highway, indented with a passing wave of alarm the extensive fringe of conies on the fence bank, who popped down in front and bobbed up behind with continuous regularity; until it turned down a side track through the woods and bowling along over the pine needles and encroaching moss arrived at a lodge and a wide, white-painted wooden gate. Half a mile of grassland succeeded, divided over wide spaces by wooden fencing, and holding considerable coverts enclosed by split oak paling.

Another white gate, and they drove through the farm buildings; passed an orchard on the right, and on the left a wall buttressed with lean-to glass houses, or veined with fruit trees; a sharp turn between some laurels, a glimpse of lawn and of a brick paved stable yard thick with pigeons, their many-doorway'd cotes strung across the gable ends of the buildings, and rounding a final curve they came out upon the front of a large red brick Georgian house with balustraded stone steps and window-casements of stone showing white through the thick growing ivy.

Paul climbed out stiffly and stretched his legs, admiring the fine range of lawn which, inter-

rupted only by the carriage drive and the broad fountain in its sweep, came all round the house and rising gradually in front topped a low bank narrowing away to the entry. He heard a bar being taken down behind the folding-door, and was admitted to a large hall reaching the whole height of the house, crossed north and south with galleries, and lined up to the level of these with pictured tapestries, the heroic proportions of the woven figures being overlaid in more than one area by cabinets of capable dimensions. A fox-terrier which had followed the servant to the door had so much to say that at first no one could get a word in, but Paul presently understood that Lady Maud and Miss Selden were out but would be back before six. Would he like some tea and would he like it in the garden.

He agreed to these suggestions and soon made an ally of the terrier over a plate of bread and butter on the lawn.

It is an old controversy, who seizes Nature's charms with the greater appreciation—he who attests his devotion by living with her, or he who comes intermittently, bringing the relish of strangeness. The greater homage is not always

repaid with the more brilliant smile, and Paul, a cockney, and a sparing and infrequent worshipper, was ravished with the quiet scene; sitting on the grass with the dog, hearing the pervasive hum of bees and the distant wrangle of rooks for the last word, and watching the stiff-legged starlings walking and prodding the lawn.

Following the restless terrier through an opening in the high clipped barrier of yew which hedged the house on three sides, he found the ground to slope sharply away, by diverging grass paths, and through a maze of rhododenrons, to a small lake. One path led onto a plank jetty with handrails, where a punt was chained, and his footfall on the sounding wood put up a flight of duck from behind a little island out in midwater and set them flying in great spirals, far up, with outstretched necks.

A coot disappeared into the reeds with an impatient "pst." A lake trout leapt, and two hundred yards across, where the covert fringed the water side, wood pigeons flew out and in on noisy wings. A swan appeared from close at hand, the dog barked furiously, and quiet was at an end. Two cygnets looked out from the ruffled

plumes, and, as the parent ship drew near, launched themselves from the port and starboard quarters, not minded to go into action, in callow respect for the braggart terrier. Greedy, suspicious, and resentful, the old bird hissed round the landing stage, where no dog now remained, and warned the visitor off her private water.

Not on a sufficiently assured footing to dispute with her, Paul sauntered on round the pond-side, the terrier "pointing" invisible game and chasing shrieking blackbirds between the bushes.

He felt that his footing was altogether bad, and planned excuses for his presence. He wished he had come as Paul Arden. He wished that Billinghurst had come with him. He wished he hadn't come at all. And with that there was a sound of wheels, the dog left him like a stone from a catapult, and a minute later he could see a white dress crossing the lawn towards the lower ground, the dog, a small white object, leaping up and down at an outstretched hand.

It was a frank, merry face came towards him, brown and brisk, and a high voice gave him greeting before he was within range of handshake of the sunburnt hand already freed from

the fettering glove now grasped, as to the button end, in the dog's teeth; who swung his weight on it without anxiety on the owner's part.

"I did not get my brother's note until we were starting out," she explained, showing it crumpled in her hand, "or, as I much prefer gardens without parties in them, I should have stayed at home to receive you."

"It is very kind of you to receive me at all. Meanwhile your little dog has been showing me round."

"No doubt he had tea with you, too—let go, you fiend! You should have brought my brother down with you. He has had time to eat a dozen dinners by now. He can't have anything to do."

Paul thought, on the contrary, that Billinghurst would have his hands full, but conceited himself that he could play Lord Billinghurst's part at Burton Paddocks well enough; but she was scrutinising him with all the appalling frankness of the English maiden, and he trembled for his disguise, and stiffened in his manner.

Putting up his eyeglass, he expressed surprise that Lord Billinghurst should neglect such pleasant avocation, and was beginning to speak of

the Bar as a profession when Lady Maud made a face of most undisguised dislike and, exclaiming that she must change her dress, ran off towards the house.

"We'll try for a trout before dinner!" she cried as she ran.

"A child of Nature," murmured Mr. Beauclerk. "A good sort," thought Paul Arden. "I think I shall tell her. Tomorrow."

In the interim he sought a compromise. He unmoored the punt, fetched a pole from the garden-house, and had the boat bailed and alongside on her return. She was visibly mollified and stepped aboard, with her rod, in better opinion of him.

He paddled her gently round the island, but while she plied her line she did not cease to talk.

"What do you do with yourself in London, Mr. Beauclerk?" she asked.

"Mine is a life of leisure tempered by hobbies," replied Mr. Beauclerk, urbanely, fixing his glassy stare on the ring left by a mocking trout.

"That does not sound exciting," she said doubtingly.

"Excitement is best seen in retrospect," said

he, sententiously, but with present meaning in his nod.

He took in the brooding light, the sheltering repute of the mansion, and the evening cool; and he caressed his moustache. She looked at him, puzzled; then cast again.

"I hope you are not easily bored," she said.

"Never," said the guest firmly. She laughed with pleasure.

"I am so glad to hear that. So many people ask me what I do with my time. Why, I have never known a day long enough for me yet!"

"Perhaps you go to bed early," suggested Mr. Beauclerk, who still felt himself on the wrong side of the account on the matter of sleep.

"I do. But I am downright sorry for leisured people who have not sufficient imagination to keep themselves amused—"

"Overfed and underworked. Yes, I know them. They talk mostly—"

"They are under no necessity to work—"

"And have no spirits to play."

"They have no wish to be helpful—"

"And end by losing the power to be amiable."

"I wouldn't say that, but their society is dull, certainly."

"Naturally, you don't find it good enough?"

"Only the best is good enough for me," cried Lady Maud, casting widely; "as you see I live in splendid isolation."

He laughed. "London does not see much of you, then?"

"No. London comes down here sometimes, though. We have house-parties in the autumn. Londoners get tired of London even."

"You are severe. But I warn you I shall not soon tire of Burton Paddocks."

Lady Maud reeled in her line and dwelt upon the sunset for a moment.

"There was a girl staying here last year," she began impressively, citing a crushing instance, "whom I drove up onto the downs to look at the sea. (We will go tomorrow," she said parenthetically, "one can look from Beachy Head to the Isle of Wight.) She actually asked me if I didn't get tired of the sea. I said, 'do you grow tired of the sky?' "

The Londoner shook his head.

"We don't see the sky in London," he said; "your retort missed fire."

"That's a pity. I thought she looked as if she didn't know what I was talking about. Well, there are no trout tonight. I have talked too much. And it's nearly dinner time."

They poled round the shallows to the little pier again, releasing the impatient terrier, whose eagerness to go on board was only equalled by his anxiety to get ashore again, and returned to the house.

At dinner Miss Selden made a third, an elderly lady suffering from shock to the system without apparent cause, and wrapped in a black silk shawl.

Both ladies retired extremely early, and the visible indoor staff, a housekeeper, and a man out of livery, also betook themselves to bed, and Paul was left alone in the library to work off the adverse balance of riotous nights. He browsed a while on the lower shelves with heavy eyes, then followed the household to repose.

Daybreak brought cold consideration on which he acted, and he went down to breakfast prepared for that adverse criticism of the eye his

young hostess was unskilled or scornful to conceal.

Lady Maud was making the tea, and looking up to say good morning she was immediately struck by the change in her guest's appearance. A clean shaven face met her look with an impassiveness to which, yesterday, the moustache had lent an oddness standing for expression.

It is always an offence when a friend alters his index by the addition or subtraction of a familiar feature; for so deep rooted is the absurd habit of judging from appearances that the sprouting of a beard, or the withdrawal of a fringe, strikes as the revelation of a trait of character, or as the shrinking of a certain disposition on which we have built an understanding.

That Lady Maud's frown was not founded on any conscious or unconscious appreciation of this injury was simply due to the fact that her brother's friend was still a comparative stranger to her, but the charge grew from his unfamiliar standing.

It was an impertinence, she said to herself, to play such tricks in a strange house. If a young man was still shilly-shallying between a mous-

tache and no moustache, he must range the wilds until he comes to terms with himself.

She gave him her hand coldly, and checked the unfolding of her morning plans. Paul was sensitive to the "frost" but did not yield to it, and tided over the occasion with unperturbed civilities. But cheerful conversation at breakfast is a speciality of the elders even in favorable circumstances, and the only really pleasant moment of the meal was when the terrier burnt his nose against the kettle-stand in the fender, and a common sympathy restored their contact.

An hour later they set out for the downs and before they had walked a mile a natural though unlooked for incident precipitated the event and threw him on the mercy, and into the power, of his entertainer. They left the gardens by an approach leading to the side of the estate removed from the paddocks, and crossed a small but beautiful chase—or rather park, for it was of ancient enclosure—where great curmudgeon oaks nursed gouty knees in swathing fern, growing crooks of timber through the centuries in old world obstinacy and heart warming disregard of modern requirements.

A herd of fallow buck rustled away from their passage, pressing close together, stamping and tossing lightly at the teasing flies. A fragment of ruin, shapeless in ivy, marked the site of a former dwelling when the chase was all in all.

Overhead the unbroken blue was deepening and a hot day was in promise. They scaled the bordering palisade where some slight footholds and an upright handrail conducted the path onto the high road, which soon degenerated into a farm road; from that to a cattle track, and then over stiles to a steep and steeper footpath leading to the lower slopes of the downs.

Pausing at the first stile for a breath, Lady Maud put a startling question.

"I wonder if you know a friend of my brother's, called Arden—a Mr. Paul Arden?"

Her companion took his breath also, and contented himself, for the nonce, with a hesitating repetition of the name.

She continued, moving on again, "I had a letter from my father this morning asking whether I knew anyone of that name. I was going to speak to you about it, but something put it out of my head. That wretch Billinghurst has been

up to mischief, I suspect. It seems that he is staying with my Aunt Theo in Chelsea again. I can't imagine why he didn't come down here if he is in a scrape."

She went on to explain, frankly enough, that Lord Horsham was not an easy tempered parent, Paul confronting alternatives and chasing possibilities in his mind, until over the apparent crest of the hill, the rising and retiring summit which cheats the ascending pilgrim, some young men came suddenly in view, striding or slipping down the grassy inclines at a great pace, and sending their voices far and wide before them.

"Some of Mr. Hopeful's young men," said Lady Maud, glancing up. "The crammer at Steadham, You know."

Paul did know, and remembered that he had an acquaintance there; and no sooner remembered him than he saw him advancing, coming down on him in fact—a catastrophe.

The half dozen fresh looking youths in startling tweeds and yellow boots shot past them in their facile descent, and one, raising his cap rather bashfully, blurted out a "Hullo, Arden,"

and, gathering momentum, was gone, with his companions, in an instant.

Paul continued to climb in silence, and Lady Maud, after a moment's surprised halt, did the same; nor did they stop until the conquered down had unfolded its final outline and they could walk erect on the broad summits of the sunbaked, air-scoured barriers between the silver Channel and the soft southern country behind them.

CHAPTER XII

A COMMAND PERFORMANCE

"MR. BEAUCLERK, why did that man call you Arden?"

There was no shelter or retreat. Only the open down, and her unavoidable gaze.

"He was evoking a memory," said Mr. Beauclerk.

"Do you know him?"

"Arden did—"

"Did? And why Arden?"

"Arden no longer walks the earth. That is why Lord Horsham cannot find him; although he has entertained him unawares, and continues to shelter him."

"Continues—you spoke of him in the past tense just now."

"Paul Arden was sacrificed on the altar of friendship, but his spirit has been re-incarnated—"

"Mr. Beauclerk, it will be very inconvenient to me if you go mad on the top of this down."

"I will endeavour to explain. You have perhaps read of wizards who could shed the body like an old coat, and go out into the night in other shapes? But if an enemy or some evil accident destroyed the inanimate form, or shell, the wizard was homeless, and must remain invisible, or make what he could of his borrowed tenement; were his disguise a wolf's skin, or merely—" He felt for his moustache, but caressed the empty air, and regarded her doubtfully.

She sat down on the short turf, and embraced her knees. "I like fairy tales," she said, "go on."

"This Arden, then, abandoned his earthly dwelling and, being pursued by enemies and unable to pick his steps, unfortunately put his foot through his old skin—so to speak—damaging it almost irrevocably. And worse than that, he put his foot on a lady's skirts and tore them also."

"I hope you are going to translate soon?"

"The name of the lady is the key to the cryptogram."

"And who was she?"

He looked at her with a challenging eye, leaning on his stick.

"Do say it was *my* skirt. It only needs that."

"It was."

"And what is necessary for his redemption? I believe one should humour lunatics," she added, addressing the sky.

"If you could promise to forgive the rent he might proceed to patch his own reputation. Please promise!"

"And if I promise?"

"Then he shall appear to you."

Lady Maud screamed and shut her eyes. "Is he very frightful?" she asked.

"Most certainly not," disclaimed Mr. Beauclerk, with resentment; "open your eyes when I say three—and be gentle with the shivering soul! One, two, three."

She opened her eyes. "I thought as much," she said, calmly.

"You find him so hideous?" he asked, indignantly.

"He is all spotted with sins. He had better confess as soon as possible."

He knelt on the turf, pulling up his trousers carefully.

"This is Arden speaking to you. He and your brother, Lord Billinghurst, assisted as seconds in a duel on Monday night—"

'Oh, don't say that this is part of the fairy story!"

"No. This is a plain tale—a history."

She clapped her hands.

"It ended seriously—"

He waited—

"Oh, Mr. Arden!"

"He, that is I, ran—we all ran. Except—you understand—. I became Mr. Beauclerk; but I ran into the hands of Justice and had to shape a tale. I put the blame on Arden."

"It was generous of you."

"There was no such person, remember. I said he had fought for—"

"For his ladye love, of course."

"For you!"

"For me! Oh, ripping!" and to his relief she was ravished with laughter. He heard her with

a double pleasure, and sinking to a seat he recounted details and explained his windings and doublings, to her heart's content, down to the change of countenance that morning. Her free high-pitched laughter was a joy to hear.

"You looked simply odious in it," she protested; "you looked like a croupier."

"It was the growth of a dissolute but charming nobleman," he said, regretfully, "but perhaps the footlights are a help."

He sighed for a lost illusion.

"And now Billinghurst is to wear it, you say;" she rocked with delight again. "He'll look perfectly disgusting. I shall go and see him."

"Then so will I," said Paul, decisively. "He wants steadying. He seemed to think it a joke. I don't believe," he said despondently, "that he has the least notion how a man of his position should carry himself on the stage."

"Do you think he is more successful off it?"

"You are a merciless critic, but you were imposed upon by our late friend Beauclerk."

"Never," she protested, with vigour; "why the very dog sees no difference in you."

"If it were only he who followed the trail!"

"Well, yours leads nowhere, after all. But the end of Mr. Raggleston's quest is likely to see the hunter hunted."

"Had I given your brother the first chance I might have spared myself two anxieties, and Miss Heimer one."

"But Mr. Raggleston will be with her—"

"I am not so sure of that," said Paul; "but that's another's story."

"Another story?"

"Another's. But I will tell it you—what there is of it." And he confided his suspicions as to Daisy. But Lady Maud was delighted.

"He told me that only the best was good enough for him."

Paul smiled his acknowledgment on Daisy's behalf.

"I told him he wasn't good enough for the best, and I hope he took it to heart. He's rather a friend of mine."

"Do you think him selfish?"

"He is a strong-willed sort of person."

"It's much the same thing. There is not much opening for a strong will if you come to think of it. It demands the *dignus vindice nodus.*

But the active selfishness that overcomes passive unwillingness is a common enough quality, and useful."

"If your sister's anything like you, Mr. Arden, she will be worthy of the exercise; for you are ready to contest anything. And it seems to me that you have all tied yourselves in a knot that somebody will have to cut."

"It is all knotted about von Deggendorf. If he shuffles off the mortal coil it will tighten round somebody's neck."

"Oh, Mr. Arden, don't be dreadful."

"On the other hand, if he can hold his own and get to his legs, a pull at either end should unravel the whole."

They descended on excellent terms. The sun had sucked up the light mist, and as they skidded down the glazing turf they divined an afternoon of shade and hammock. A last look seaward saw the topsail of a distant brig, reaching over under the push of a gathering breeze, mark with an interrogation point the indeterminate horizon; and the pearl white haze above hold horizontal streaks of hanging smoke from the passage of some steamer lost over the rim of the waters.

Lady Maud was pleasantly intrigued and heart and soul in the business. Paul was glad of a confidant, for it little suited him to sit tongue-tied, and relieved to have made it clear that in seeking Burton Paddocks he had sought the inevitable sanctuary. He should not mind now if Billinghurst did not turn up on Saturday. But if Lord Horsham did? But Billinghurst had pronounced against that possibility, and it was no good meeting troubles halfway.

Miss Selden thought otherwise, though, and met them in the Park with an open letter, her nervous constitution evidently shaken by a recent shock.

"Good morning, Mr. Beauclerk," she said, giving him her trembling fingers, and the guest looked fearfully at his new associate, feeling the value of the Masonic exclusiveness.

"My dear, I must speak to you a minute. Your father writes—"

He hung back, whistling for the dog, and changed his opinion again. If Lord Horsham was on the war-path, he had done well to trust the Châtelaine of Burton Paddocks. She soon let

him know the worst, running back with mischievous eyes.

"My father comes down on Monday," she cried.

"I suppose it is the instinct of the chase that makes you see fun in it," said the quarry, with some bitterness.

"I wouldn't miss it for worlds," she said. "It will be as good as a play."

"No, it won't. I can't act without my make-up."

"You always think very poorly of the rest of the company, Mr. Arden."

"What a cruel jibe! And I in your power."

"Poor thing! Shall I hide you?"

"Perhaps I had better go to Arlington Street, now Lord Horsham wants his country house for himself."

"You can't," she said, with simplicity. "He will bring the household with him. He wants a lot of people asked to dinner that night."

He considered. "Beauclerk can't appear again—"

"Why not?"

"A moustache is not grown again as quickly as it is shaved off."

"I see—Aunt Selden."

"Exactly. And the name of Arden is proscribed."

"Then appear as Arden under the name of Beauclerk."

"And how shall I explain my visit here?"

"*You* won't be asked to explain it."

"That is generous. I forgive your taunt. But this will want much talking over."

The days passed pleasantly. Miss Selden was scarcely seen more, overlooking the housekeeper who superintended the servants, who bullied the stablemen, who forayed the distant tradesmen, and riding forth, east, west and south and north, summoned the guests.

The early advent of the Arlington Street staff brought a change over the three faces of the house which opened their many blinded windows on the sunny lawns, disclosing gilt and tapestried interiors, whence holland covers were whisked in troops like sheeted ghosts at break of day.

Lady Maud and Paul kept the lake and woods,

she heartening her refugee whose spirits were sinking to the desperate alternatives of a hollow tree, or a maroon's solitude on the island.

Lord Horsham was not arriving until the last moment, on the Monday, and before he was due Paul was out of sight in his room on the bachelor's corridor at the top of the house, where one round window, set like an eye in the pediment of the building, looked over the balustraded parapet of the north front. Hence his fearful gaze described his host's approach, and here the echo of his arrival came up faintly through clanging doors. Paul achieved his toilet but did not descend till several other carriages had driven up, set down, and departed; for, feeling rather like a pickpocket, he naturally preferred to mingle in the crowd. Lord Beauclerk's facial embellishments locked away from prying eyes, and the looking-glass returning him a satisfactory portrait of Paul Arden, he left his room, armed with a bare name, to play out the act. At the end of the corridor he stayed to look down on the stable-yard where unbitted horses were being led to temporary quarters by unbuttoned coachmen, and envied the informal supper to

follow: cheerier than his evening would prove, he conjectured. He descended and emerged upon the south gallery, a *brouhaha* of voices and a great illumination meeting him as he opened the swing-door. The party was assembling in the hall, and he could see the square figure of the Minister backed against the hearth, several men round him. As he halted, looking down through the rail, a room-door opened at the end of the passage, and an elderly lady descended the two or three steps to his level and advanced briskly towards him.

She was short and roundabout, dressed in brown satin, with a large gold locket reposing in front, almost at right angles to her face.

"I suppose that you are Lord Billinghurst's friend," she said, in rather a loud voice. "My niece has told me of your misadventure—"

Paul started at this.

"—that he was to meet you here but that he has not come—"

He acknowledged that this was the case.

"He is supposed to be staying with me—" (then you are Aunt Theo, thought Paul) "but I never see him; though if I come down here I can

hardly blame him, can I? And whom have we here?" she pursued, in the same tones, her hand on the balcony, and looking over the company below. "Do *you* know any of them?"

He owned his strangeness to the neighbourhood.

"Let me see if I can enlighten you. I come here but once a year, but yours is the only new face I expect."

Indeed more than one head was already raised to the gallery in recognition, Lady Theodosia's voice having pierced the din of conversation, and she waved her hand to some dowagers across the hall. The guests were distinctly elderly, and Paul felt relieved. He would, perhaps, get Lady Maud.

"And what is *your* name?" said Lady Theodosia.

"Beauclerk," said Paul, in polite accents.

"You must speak louder than that," she cried. "I can't hear you."

"Beauclerk," he repeated, opening his mouth wide, but emitting a very small sound. He had his eye on Lord Horsham and could have sworn he was listening.

"Bo—what?" cried she. "Bo—what? Do you think you are saying Bo to a goose?"

This was dreadful. He shouted the name and the Marquis's eye travelled up to the sound of it.

"Oh," said Lady Theodosia, as if she didn't like it now she knew it. "Well. You know my brother, I suppose, so I needn't point him out. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Beauclerk, that I am not a *persona grata* here, but I insist on an invitation once a year for my niece's sake, that people may remember she has an aunt, and that it isn't my doing that she is growing up like a red Indian."

Paul's gaze fell on Miss Selden, who was peering round the hall, a slip of paper in her hand, pairing the guests.

"Jane Selden is an imbecile—but that's no affair of yours." He was inclined to think otherwise. "There's General Bootlebury, I see. He's at the War Office—I must have a chat with him. That's the Vicar, Mr. Tacit, with the grey whiskers; and that's his wife talking to Dr. Wisbech, the biologist, the old gentleman with the white hair. There's Sir James Tuson, the Member, the goodlooking man talking with my brother. He

talks too much. He married one of the Viegelts—that's Mrs. Viegelt, dressed in diamonds. Her servants have a billiard-room and two days' covert-shooting in the autumn." She took a further survey. "Upon my word. There's that hateful Mrs. 'Jack' Rusher, as she calls herself. Well. I have never seen *her* here before. It is her footmen, you know, who always meet the down-trains and ask right and left, 'for Stoughton House, my lord?' or 'for Stoughton House, your grace?' It impresses strangers very much, I believe. You can hear her laugh above everything."

Paul only prayed that it might drown the words.

"But we must go down. I see them announcing dinner."

Below she was met with propitiatory smiles and timid greetings, but Paul was alone until he caught Lady Maud's eye, and making his way across was presented to her father.

This was well managed, for Lord Horsham was just making the first move and could but give his hand and a word of greeting. Paul fell back towards the tail of the procession unscathed, and found his place near the foot of the table

where Lady Theodosia and General Bootlebury took their seats in amity, having but just met. Doctor Wisbech and the Vicar's wife were near, and opposite to Paul a youngish man some ten years his senior, who looked rather keenly at him, he thought.

Lady Maud had been raised from his sphere, and faced her father in the middle of the room with county magnates three deep on either side, while far away at the other end could occasionally be seen as she bobbed nervously behind the flowers, the anxious countenance of Miss Selden, small by distance and smaller with apprehension.

Small talk, that running commentary on the obvious so wonderfully sustained by women, carried them over a course or two, but the first glass of champagne whetted the edge of Lady Theodosia's tongue. Whetted, not wetted: for she was drinking hot water, to the discomfort of the General, who objected to the very steam.

"It would be interesting to know what you are all drinking," she said, genially. "I have read that more champagne is drunk in St. Petersburg alone than the French vineyards can produce."

Mrs. Tacit set down her glass with a troubled face, but the General's tenets were not open to attack. He had closed the approaches many years since, and theory and speculation were winds that might blow where they listed.

"Have you asked Lord Horsham?" inquired Doctor Wisbech, humourously, looking at her glass.

"Oh, yes, I have put the question to him." And, indeed, nobody doubted her.

"It's Mumm," said the practical General, who had simply asked the butler.

"Perhaps the Russians get the imitation," suggested Mrs. Tacit, mildly.

"And the Alliance?" said Lady Theodosia, with a superior smile.

"Water without and wine within, my dear Lady," said the General, "and this is sufficiently like the real thing for me."

"The War Office is not in love with inquiry, we know," said Lady Theodosia, always ready for action herself; and Mrs. Tacit looked fearful for the peace, but Doctor Wisbech, a ruddy, clean shaven old gentleman whose shoulders the microscope had bent though it had not dimmed his

eye, began to rally her on her many heterodoxies.

"The spirit that prompts suspicion of our host's wine must be the very Spirit that Denies," he declared. "My dear Lady Theodosia, you must be a reincarnation of some bold Manichee, or of some too early scientist for whom they used to make things so hot. Faggots, for instance. The Church has burnt people for lesser doubts."

"Yes, they burned heretics, I know," cried Lady Theodosia, who subscribed to the maxim that attack is the best defence. "But had there been a College of Surgeons in power instead of the Holy Office, they would have vivisected the believers. To get at their principles," she added, with a triumphant wink at Paul who had caught her eye.

Doctor Wisbech chuckled, Mrs. Tacit smiled deprecatingly, and searched her small store of indifferent topics for something to barter, and General Bootlebury continued his dinner. He did not understand that sort of talk. He had thought the wine was under discussion. As an Englishman he had urged the flying ball from the age of knickerbockers and marbles, to the sixth age of knickerbockers and Haskells, but the ball

of conversation, like any other, must be kept within boundaries.

"Any ball but a bullet," his free-spoken neighbour had once suggested, but as the General had pointed out, laughing, a bullet is not a ball. He had promised to show her one, and had enjoyed his triumph, which no one had grudged him, for it was very rude of Lady Theodosia.

More than one passage of arms followed before the end of dinner, and as the good lady invariably chose the ground, took the offensive, and had an ungenerous advantage in not drinking fair, she was enabled to leave the engagement with her colours unlowered, her adversaries worsted in turn like the galleons in the ballad.

"Have you found your man yet, Mr. West?" she asked finally, as she rose from the table.

Paul's opposite neighbour smiled with blank civility, his hand on his chairback.

"The Green Park Murderer?"

"Still at large," said West, surprised but understanding; "but perhaps not so safe as he thinks."

Lady Maud, who was passing down the side of the room, looked at Paul, who looked from her

to West, who in his turn glanced lightly at him as he spoke laughingly to his interlocutress. It was but a glance, but it had been timed to take in the momentary and passing signal on the other side of the room.

"You have at least the detective's sanguine temperament," said Lady Theo, passing through the doorway, followed by a parting shot from Doctor Wisbech.

The Green Park murderer resumed his seat with a good face, Doctor Wisbech closed the door and West shifted his seat nearer, the General moving up the table with his glass to company more worthy of him.

"And who is the Green Park murderer?" inquired Doctor Wisbech passing the wine to Paul.

"That's what I want to know," said West easily, but with a look at Paul which nearly drew from him the expressive Americanism, "you may search me."

But he said aloud, "Has there been a murder?" being naturally most anxious to know, thinking indeed of little else.

"Well—no," said West and, his hand rather forced, spoke a few explanatory words.

When he had visited Collingham Gardens he had, as a matter of course, kept his eyes open for any portrait of the delinquent, and no sooner had he taken his seat that evening than he saw, and could have sworn to, the original of the most favoured photograph in Miss Arden's sitting room; likenesses early in the interview acknowledged with pride by poor Daisy.

Billinghurst's unseasonable absence, and Beauclerk's unreasonable presence, pointed to a plot, and a plot in which Lady Maud had a hand. That she had a share in it should rob it of its worst aspects, but Miss Arden's avowed unacquaintance with the trouble, or even with his chief's family, counterbalanced this more favourable view. Was Lord Billinghurst the culprit? He was nonplussed for the moment and felt certain only of Beauclerk's identity. But the name had been worrying the Marquis too, and more at leisure now that the ladies had left the room, he noticed the three at the lower end of the table.

The French windows were open onto the lawns and feminine voices came across the grass out of the darkness. Two or three men took their cigars into the open, and Lord Horsham drawing his

immediate neighbors into contact extricated himself from between with the ability of a table-turning medium and came down the room and entered into conversation with Doctor Wisbech.

"And your name is Beauclerk," he presently said abruptly, turning round on Paul, who sat near to him, and fixing on him a gaze he endeavoured to lenify into interest. "A young man of your name called on me the other day—have you a brother?"

Paul had taken coffee, refused milk, and the second footman was following up with liqueurs. Something impelled him to glance up and he met the probing eye of his friend in need at Horsham House. He put out his hand to the vari-coloured *chasses* but the footman turned the tray. "Brandy, sir," he said sympathetically, and Paul accepted the hint with gratitude. He did not know whether a brother was a chance to catch at, or a complication to avoid, but he denied the brother. Taxed, however, with an acquaintance with Paul Arden, he acknowledged that, with the pleasure of one who, seeking a footing in strange company, finds a friend in common.

"And Miss Arden?" asked West, as junior

prompting his chief, who was conducting the examination, while Doctor Wisbech occupied the bench in a frame of mind innocent of bias.

"I have known the Ardens all my life," said Mr. Beauclerk, evidently charmed with his subject. "They are great friends of mine. I admire Miss Arden extremely. I—I think she is generally admired." He looked into his empty glass with a touch of natural embarrassment that made the elder men smile, but threw a shade over Mr. West, whose cross fire slackened. But Lord Horsham opened on him again.

"But this other Mr. Beauclerk. Rather foreign looking—wears an eyeglass—rolls his rr's, and uses his hands like a Frenchman."

At present Mr. Beauclerk started, looked earnestly but doubtfully at the Marquis, and then at Mr. West. "Paul Arden is an amateur actor," he said slowly. "I have heard people call him an admirable actor. Your description of this Beauclerk whom I have never met, is that of a favourite impersonation of Arden's."

"Fooled," cried the Marquis, bringing down his fist emphatically on the table and looking at his secretary. "It was Arden himself then, the

young scoundrel! The young scoundrel!" he repeated, throwing himself back in his chair, while Mr. Beauclerk and the Doctor sat in polite astonishment. "And he borrowed the name from you, of course?"

Mr. Beauclerk nearly spread his hands, but didn't. "It sounds like it," he said cautiously, a suspicion of cold resentment in his tone. Even a life-long friend may not borrow and mishandle one's name.

"I see it all," cried the Marquis. "I see it all," he said, recounting his suspicions to himself, and gratified by their tardy verification, while the injured one met his comprehensive vision with courteous injuiry on his open countenance.

"I must confess I thought for a moment that you were the same man," said Lord Horsham, laughing to himself. "I can laugh now at his impudence, but at the time I was seriously annoyed. How was young von Deggendorf this afternoon, West?" Paul held his breath over the answer, but neither hope nor fear was fulfilled, for the secretary was groping for his napkin below the table edge and missed, or for his own purposes affected not to hear, the inquiry; and

Lord Horsham rose and left the table, he telling Doctor Wisbech something of the affair. Paul breathed deep and thankfully as he followed the secretary into the garden, the tension of the moment relaxed, and the real anxiety of days lifted from his shoulders.

He was off his guard then, when West, stopping short before he left the lighted room, said: "You are right about Paul Arden." He forced a smile of interrogation. "He is certainly an admirable actor."

"You know him?" said Paul, summoning back Beauclerk to his aid, but before he could resume the mask West put a hand on his arm and led him down the steps.

"Yes, I know him," he said, "but I should like to know him better. Let us take a turn up the garden."

CHAPTER XIII

A CURTAIN-LIFTER

LADY MAUD, who had the eye of a nighthawk, did not fail to note the companionship, and, half an hour later, missing Paul from the dim lawns where most of the party strolled or sat, she slipped into the house and, picking up her best skirt, ran like a deer through dark familiar passages to the library.

Across an anteroom came a streak of light from the half-closed door, but no sound. In she went and found her man sitting discomfited and alone in a circle of lamplight, drawing comfort from a cigarette.

"Well," she said breathlessly. "I can't stay," she added, as he pulled out a chair for her, "but tell me your news. How in this man—Herr von Deggendorf?"

"I can't make out," replied Paul in considerable dejection. "West's as close as an oyster. I only know that he's alive and I have to thank Lady Theodosia for extracting that much. And yet he bled very effectively."

"Oh, don't!" she implored, shuddering and putting her hands before her face. "What must poor Mr. Raggleston have felt!"

Paul laughed. "Shall I write and soothe his sensitive spirit? I wonder if it keeps him awake at night? The people I am sorry for are the Ardens."

"Particularly the brother, I suppose?"

"Particularly for the brother; though I am sorry for Daisy, too. It seems that West visited her on behalf of your father, and saw my photo. So he was not to be denied, and made me stand and unfold myself."

She began to laugh. "I was called upon to do it for you, but I left you veiled."

"Which me?"

"Both of you. Mr. Arden I had never met, and Mr. Beauclerk was no friend of mine."

"I don't like the sound of that; you might have expressed it differently."

"Why, I detested him!"

"Your dislike is incomprehensible to me. But you know Arden now."

"So does my father if it comes to that. And you know his opinion of him; both directly and indirectly, if I remember right."

"I am indeed but a shadow of respectability; but I must fade from the scene before West's bull's-eye is uncovered. West wanted the whole story. Of course, I could not give it him until I knew the probable upshot, both of events and their consequences; and whatever he may know of the Baron's prospects, and of others dependent on them, he will not part with it. He has given me until tomorrow morning to compose my confession and to out with it. If I am recalcitrant I am to be delivered over to the Marquis."

Her expressive pantomime, as coming from a member of the family, was not reassuring.

"So far, the real I, the genuine Simon Pure, or simple Simon, has taken no hand in this concern. It has been a disembodied spectator, its fleshly tabernacle disguised, miscalled, and aspersed, but itself blameless, or at least unblamed. And I would keep it so. Unless I escape tonight, the

next twenty-four hours should see your aversion, Beauclerk, not even a name, Arden rehabilitated, yet so as by fire, and Lord Horsham's judgment cleared; a task I would rather leave to your filial piety. But ——."

"But what becomes of the Quest?"

"It is blown sky-high."

"Yes, you must be removed; you're a perfect powder magazine. If only my brother would write," starting rather guiltily as she spoke, for the anteroom was crossed by a step and the library entered. It was but one of the men bringing candles and the evening post.

"Mr. Beauclerk, one for you, sir." Paul took up the letter and would probably have hesitated at the unfamiliar address, but Lady Maud cried out with conviction, "It's from Bill; open it and see what he says."

He opened it and leaning forward they looked at it together:

"MY DEAR ARDEN—I am sorry I could not keep my promise of coming down this week-end to look after you, and can only hope you are not insufferably bored."

("Dear Brother Bill, I love him for his hopes and fears.") *The fact is*

("Now for the truth," interpolated the sister again) *these theatricals of ours keep me too busy. I have been hard at it ever since you left me, and I have made tremendous progress. My reading of the part is not quite yours, I hear. Beauclerk I find somewhat overweighted with intrigue. I am trying to arrange a comic scene for him with the milkmaid.*

("Just heaven!" groaned Paul, "why was this man brought across my path?") *Every one thinks that this would be an improvement.*

("You *are* rather solemn, you know," said Lady Maud over his shoulder; "not you, you know, but Beauclerk." The original gulped down his feelings and read on.) *"You need not make yourself uneasy. You will not be missed."* ("Go on," said Lady Maud impatiently.) *"So try and put up with my young sister for a bit—"*

("Go on, do," said Lady Maud, furiously, "don't keep stopping." Paul went on with a jerk.) *"and I'll let you know when it's safe for you to move. Von Deggendorf is in a very grave state, and you must on no account appear. I hear*

indeed that Miss Heimer has returned to London to see him. I am so sorry for the poor beggar—"

Arden dropped the letter and looked at his companion blankly. A dismayed silence settled on them for a minute.

"It doesn't seem to spoil his fun though," said Lady Maud.

"What's fun to him is death to me," said Paul. "As an understudy he—"

"You are one more selfish than another!" exclaimed Lady Maud. "Give me the letter," she said, catching at it. She read on frowningly—*"so sorry for the poor beggar that I have resigned the Quest to him."*

"Ha!" she laughed scornfully, "it was about time when the Quest had gone to him of her own accord. I see what it all means well enough, though I suppose you would have gaped at it all night."

Paul, his good conceit at a discount, shut his mouth quickly and sat up to listen. "Who is this Miss Vane?"

Inclined to gape again, he kept his lips shut.

"There is this much to be said for you; that

had she made the same impression on you you would not be so blind to Billinghurst's schemes. *'I have made tremendous progress. I have resigned the Quest. You will not be missed—stay where you are.'* My good man, it just means that he is having a good time and can do without your presence on the stage and off!"

The perversity of his vanity made this interpretation comparatively soothing, and he thought more kindly of Billinghurst. "He can do what he likes off," he said incautiously.

"And Mr. Raggleston? Your acute mind has of course perceived that your precious Quest must have been resigned by him to my brother."

He got up rather hastily and threw away his cigarette. "I think I had better go straight home tomorrow," he said.

"I don't see why you shouldn't," she said mildly. "Even if you have to leave again. But there is more of this."

"Yes? He doesn't even know when he has said enough."

"Tomorrow's dress rehearsal is to be public for the benefit of a charity. I go to your friends, the Vanes, for tonight, in order that Miss Vane may

coach me as far as possible. I am getting on like a house on fire."

"Her conception of the part!" muttered Paul despairingly.

"Her conception undoubtedly, I should say," she concurred.

"Lie doggo, and I will arrange everything for the best."

"Comic relief—getting on like a house on fire!"

Stirred to their depths they gazed on the letter, breathing fiercely.

"Our alliance must not expire until we have seen the end of this," said Paul. "I implore your help in withdrawing your brother from these theatricals. He will ruin everything."

"You shall have it."

"He will overdo the part."

"I fear so."

"If only I could save the last act"—he raised his arms in agitation.

"We must stop that, certainly," said Lady Maud, with a decision that surprised him.

"I will look in on them tomorrow at all costs."

"So will I."

"But tomorrow—"

"Listen. I know how we can escape Mr. West. Go to bed now and be out of the way when the house is cleared. Tomorrow morning we will both go to town early before they are up. I will drive you down in my cart. Don't oversleep yourself, but have your bag packed and be ready by eight o'clock."

"If the faithful James will stand by me it can be done. You are my good genius, though your house be hostile."

They said good night on the bargain and Lady Maud hurried back to her guests who were beginning to move.

From the drawing room came the sound of voices as they mustered preparatory to leave-taking and Paul acting on her advice and permission made straight for his bedroom without much fear of his withdrawal being noticed.

From his open window he watched, with cautious head, the carriage lamps raying the dark evergreens that hedged the gravel, and reckoned the lessening numbers downstairs as family omnibus or hardy dog-cart turned away from the steps.

He had a growing, indeed an overgrown, fear

that, the evening ended, his inquisitors would ascend in search of him, and he was comforted when shadows fell across the oblongs of light from Lord Horsham's room at the east corner, and voices and wreathing smoke through the open windows made it plain that the greater leisure of some nearer neighbors had procured him a respite from attention.

He began now to put his things together.

It was a matter of regret to him that he should be forced to leave without acknowledgment, and he questioned whether it were possible for the high-toned outlaw or feudatory foe invariably to preserve his manners. The occasion must arise, as now, when farewells must be dispensed with and hospitality, though involuntary, go unthanked.

He would be in a fine position to blackmail the next Lord Horsham, he thought as he packed. "If the man drives me into the criminal class I shall take it out of Billinghurst one day. And I need not share with Raggleston either. I should know too much about him. I wonder how much Daisy knows about him."

He sat on the bed and wondered. "If he were

tamed and combed and washed he might not be so bad," he considered. He lay back, his arms under his head, and rambled on sleepily. "Perhaps I had better hang Raggleston and marry her to the future Marquis, seeing I should have the family in my power; or let Raggleston off if he will marry Molly Vane. And he ought to jump at it. Or the Heimer, if he paid me a million down. Then we could keep up this place nicely. We could—we—" He dozed and dreamed pleasantly, to wake with a start to the striking of the stable clock. It was midnight, his candle was burnt low, and beneath the window Lord Horsham was saying good night to the last of his guests.

He blew out the guttering light, and slipped into bed, mindful that he was in the house of the Capulets.

He awoke to receive his instructions from James.

"Breakfast in the library this morning, Sir, as soon as you are ready. The cart is not coming round as her Ladyship will start from the stable-yard."

He descended to find her ladyship as fresh as

paint, breakfast steaming, and the terrier's mouth being stopped with buttered scones.

"He has found us out and unless he is fed he threatens to bark the house down," she explained.

They did not linger over the table and Lady Maud picking up her gloves and taking down her whip, drove the dog under the couch and they made for the stables, where her mare and cart, drawn off the clattering yard into the roadside, awaited their coming. Paul glanced back at the sleeping house as they fled down the drive, but it opened no eye, and the rush of sweet morning air brought an exhilarating sense of risk avoided and adventure yet unchecked.

"They couldn't catch us now even if they were awake," she said, settling her hat. "My Méggy can lose anything in the stables in the first half mile. You have been expecting to hear 'let the portcullis fall' any time this half hour, I am sure."

He owned his relief, and the mare getting onto the straight of the high road, they began to lay their plans for the day.

Paul was to make straight for his home, making the best of his start, get supplies for a further

period of outlawry, enlighten Daisy, exhort and browbeat Raggleston, if found on the premises, and repair at lunch time to a rendezvous agreed on.

Lady Maud was to inform herself of the Surwood performance, time and place, and make such other inquiries into delicate matters as her hitherto fair fame made permissible.

Meggy and the uptrain reached West Steadham together, and the transfer had to be made with dispatch, Paul's bag being thrust into the carriage with them, a detail of incidental concern, for they were no sooner under fair headway than she cried out that all would be lost if he arrived in town in his own person.

"I was unwilling to inflict an obnoxious traveling companion on you," he said in explanation.

"I must put up with that. Goodbye, Mr. Arden. Sorry to see your face no more, but time is imperative."

He got out his make-up, his spirit-gum and his brushes. She helped to tie his big foulard, objecting to his appearance as it grew, and her coolness towards him became marked when he surveyed her through his re-moun

His moustache grew in pliancy under the unresting fingers, his r's became more pronounced every mile.

At Croydon she was already withdrawn to the far corner of the carriage, and at Victoria they parted as strangers to the confusion of Scotland Yard cleverly disguised as a crowd; which Lady Maud threaded rapidly and alone, Monsieur Beauclerk's conquering glance following her flight as he handed his luggage to a porter. Towards one o'clock they met again, though not as friends she was careful to point out. Only the common bond of self-interest could have made her sit down with him, even in the semi-privacy of a first floor dining room.

His morning had produced little. He had let himself in with his latch-key, but found no one. Raggleston had been at the house most days, it seemed, and this morning his sister had left word that she was lunching out.

"Probably with Raggleston," complained Paul. "He has no anxieties, for I have made them mine. He has no regrets. He leaves them to your brother. He has no prospects, so he takes

the German's, and he has no sister to look after, so he takes someone else's. He ought to go far, that fellow."

"Do you think we shall find them at Surwood?"

"Oh, in the front row, no doubt. And I shall be standing at the back."

"It's as well you are seated now, or someone would call waiter," she said.

Seizing his napkin he tied it round his neck. "Your public denial of me this morning cut me to the heart, but if you revile me I know how to revenge myself."

With a piece of bread in his fingers he set about his plate, mopping up the gravy with gustatory indrawings of the breath.

She choked with annoyance and turned to see if they were alone.

CHAPTER XIV

NOT IN THE BILL

SLOWLY coming up the room was none other than the predatory Raggleston himself, wholly absorbed in Paul's appearance and performance and plainly incensed at the exhibition.

She turned again hastily and said in a furious whisper, "Here they are; and I'll never speak to you again."

Her announcement was premature, for if he expected Daisy she was not yet come.

He sat down at the next table interposing Lady Maud's straight young back between himself and the unpleasant spectacle opposite her. Her back was not reminiscent or some face was present with him, for he stared unseeingly at its lines, and as for Paul, even untravestied he might not

have remembered the arbiter of a squabble on an evening which had left no very clearly defined features on his memory, except from the final scene.

With gratification and misgiving, both, Paul saw him to be dressed with a subdued splendour which sat well enough on him, for his healthy colour and hard condition dominated the tailor's efforts, who out of a weedy customer can only make a dude.

His hat and gloves were seeing the world for the first time, but they were laid aside and he rubbed his head with his hands in visible irritation and perplexity as he studied a letter open on the table in front of him.

It was from Lord Billinghurst, and in it that admirable youth had laid himself out to rub into his friend the moral of a violent life. Whether or no his correspondent rose to his lofty standpoint, he was certainly concerned with his news, and the moving picture drawn of the sick bed at the Embassy, soothed and attended by the unselfish and conscience-stricken Billinghurst; and the indicated vision of the mournful procession soon to leave its doors, harassed the regenerate Rag-

gleston more than a little, and brought him acquainted with the difficulty of turning a new leaf. There is the debit to carry over.

Biting his nails he re-read with resentment and regret his friend's eloquent periods, and fidgeted on his chair.

A shadow fell on his table as the opposite seat was approached, and he jumped up with a greeting to be met by the ingratiating grin and eyeglass of the greedy foreigner from the corner.

"Mr. Raggleston, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he enquired extending a hand from which the other drew back as if it had been a scavenger's. The rebuff was passed over with the tact of a man who knows himself to be among savages, and declining gracefully into the empty chair the intruder pursued with a wink and an insinuating lift of the eyebrow.

"I take someone's place I fear. You are lady-killer, hein? Who is someone, I wonder. Ver' nice someone, hein?" He laughed knowingly. "Fraulein Heimer, is it—or Mees Arden?"

"Who the deuce are you?" said Raggleston fiercely; "I don't know you."

The other shook a reproachful finger.

"That is not polite talk. I know you, my friend. Hard words break no bones as you say here, but they lead to—broken swords sometimes, hein?"

Raggleston started and his forehead flushed.

"I know you now," he said. "You're a detective. And I can tell you who hired your disreputable services, too."

The detective smiled slowly as if with enjoyment, and curled his moustache with both hands.

"I watch Miss Arden's interests," he said.

Raggleston leaned confidentially across the table.

"If you mention Miss Arden again I will throw you downstairs," he said.

His expression was not pleasant, but the detective smiled unmoved.

"He has others within a whistle," thought Raggleston to himself, "but who is this girl with him?"

The lady beyond was without doubt following their conversation, but she had pulled down her veil and turned no degree of her profile.

"I will say no more of her then," resumed the foreigner, keeping up his irritating smile, "for the

stairs are hard. But it is not long since Mr. Raggleston's affections were elsewhere."

"If it were not that Daisy Arden may turn up at any moment," thought Raggleston. He felt his hands tied. He could not deal justice to this fellow and be caught in the midst of the scrimmage, so he swallowed his feelings and brought himself to parley.

"Look here you, I don't want a row in this place because I—because you are with a—you are not alone. Kindly go back to your seat and if you want to interview me afterwards, there is the smoking-room." So Mr. Raggleston with stately sulkiness.

"That is much better," said the foreign gentleman, rubbing his hands. "I go with gladness. Afterwards you will perhaps present me. For I am not deceived—ah, no!"

He laughed and winked, but vacated his chair with polite agility, directing Raggleston's attention, as he rose, to Daisy, who now appeared hurrying up the room.

Raggleston, who had been holding onto the table to restrain himself, rose to meet her, and Daisy, only conscious that she was behind time,

at once sat down in the empty place paying no heed to the whispered suggestion that they should occupy some other table.

"But this will do perfectly," she said, sitting down back to back with Lady Maud, Raggleston trying not to see the objectionable foreigner still relishing the gravy on his finger-tips and dodging his vivacious head to obtain a glimpse of this latest presentment of the appealing feminine.

"Charmante," said he audibly.

"Brute!" from Raggleston, still more audibly.

Murmured severities and surprise from Miss Arden, and angry remonstrance at the other table, not audible but visible to Raggleston in the agitation of the hat nodding towards the deprecating shrug and placating smile of the cavalier.

"I'd throw him out of the window for twopence," said Raggleston. "Waiter, for heaven's sake take that gentleman a fork." Daisy looked at him in astonishment.

"D—, that's too much." He bounded to his feet, oversetting his chair, for the foreigner with a wink at him and a leer at the sacred person of his guest, had blown a kiss from his unclean finger tips.

Daisy turned in alarm to see Raggleston's angry clutch fasten on a hairy and exotic-looking outlander whose napkined neck had slipped to the level of the table edge, while a veiled lady shaken with some strong emotion, seized Raggleston by his left arm in no fairy grip, her feelings finding vent in a scream of laughter as Daisy herself after one agitated moment, cried "Paul! Paul! Paul!" in crescendo and with every shade of alarm, joy and reproach.

"Maud!" exclaimed Raggleston, "what on earth are you doing here with this dashed Frenchman?"

"Paul, are you mad? Please let him go, Mr. Raggleston," implored Daisy.

"Paul!" said Raggleston feebly, releasing him.

"You have broken my collar," said the Frenchman, rising. "The duel is certainly preferable to the vulgar brawl. I thought, Mr. Raggleston, that I had despatched you on a Quest of some moment, but you are back on my hands again."

"Paul Arden," murmured Raggleston, wiping his brow. "Well, if you weren't your sister's brother, I'd—"

He tried to listen to Lady Maud's incoherent

account while Daisy scolded and pitied her brother, but it was not until they had all settled down to coffee and recriminations, that he began to understand his company.

Lady Maud rallied him hard on his mystification and on his dejected look. Assured that she was in the secret he showed her her brother's letter. He was in a praiseworthy and lugubrious frame of mind, but she met his serious headshakings with fresh laughter partly stirred by the visibly chastening influences working on him.

"I begin to have more respect for Bill," she cried, "when I see how he can lead you two by the nose. He always allowed me to hold you responsible for his misdoings, but I believe he is the biggest humbug in the Constitution."

"But," said Raggleston, "if he has been with Von Deggendorf all the week—scarcelv left his bedside—he says."

This was too strong, and Paul joined in and produced his own letter.

"You see he overdoes the part, as I said."

"Yes, he's not a convincing actor. Perhaps he'll do himself more justice in the scene with the milkmaid."

"I can never permit it," said Paul hotly.

"Nobody will attend to him when *you* enter the room," said Raggleston.

"I should hope not," said Paul serenely.

But they were all agreed to go. Lady Maud stoutly maintained that there was nothing the matter with Mr. von Deggendorf and she said further, "I believe my brother knows it."

Daisy smiled with glad lips, and they were all much cheered by the sister's plain-spoken and authoritative opinion of the plausible Billinghurst.

Paul, however, mindful that his position might easily become ridiculous even to himself, sounded the note of caution, but the others were unanimous in denouncing his appearance and renouncing his company.

Either he dropped his rôle or he traveled to Surwood alone. The first alternative he refused to discuss, for he had a last scheme in prospect in which his make-up was essential.

As to the second, "You need not know me," he urged. "Let me be with you if not of you."

Daisy, not knowing if he were again lost sight

of when he would reappear, supported his plea, and the arrangement was carried.

"But, remember, you shyster!" warned Raggleston, "if you attempt to speak to any of us, even to your sister—"

"Especially to my sister, you mean," interjected Paul.

Raggleston ignored the amendment, but suppressed his threat.

The shyster retired to readjust his outer man, and the others went on ahead to the station, where he was to join them.

They established themselves in an empty carriage some ten minutes before the time of starting.

Raggleston, reminded by his surroundings, entertained a furtive expectation of Miss Heimer coming to thicken the plot, and he had her commanding form, unstinted millinery and various appanages before his mind's eye when the doorway was blocked by a very different figure—the short, skimped and unattended person of Lady Theodosia.

She accepted Raggleston's help up the step without noticing him, threw a parasol and string

bag into the middle seat, and dropped panting into the corner.

Daisy felt her arm gripped in real or pretended fright, and the air was thick with wireless messages of alarm, question, sympathy, and promises of mutual support when Lady Theodosia opened her eyes after her moment's collapse.

"Maud!" she cried; "my word, young woman! But what have you done with him?" she said, looking round the carriage. "Mr. Raggleston! Then where is this Beauclerk?"

"And who is he?" asked Raggleston with good-humoured interest.

But she had turned to Daisy.

"Why, dear me, you are the young lady whose brother was lost!"

She turned and looked at Raggleston again as if to confirm her recollection. "Did Mr. Raggleston find him for you?"

"Yes," said Daisy, "Mr. Raggleston found him."

"Yes, I cornered him," confirmed Raggleston.

Lady Maud gave a sniff of derision, and her aunt looking rather stonily upon her altered the direction of her inquiries.

"But there is another young man to seek now. Maud, what have you done with this Mr. Beauclerk? Your father is very much annoyed with you."

"My dear Aunt, what have you done with Billinghurst?" retorted her niece rather smartly. "We are all very anxious to find *him*."

"Your brother has been playing Box and Cox with me for a week," protested Lady Theo. "He is in bed when I go out, and out when I go to bed. I didn't invite him and I won't be made responsible for him."

There was a fluency in her defence which savoured of preliminary delivery at Burton Paddocks that morning.

"But this Beauclerk—do you know that he is wanted by the police?"

"Then he must look out for himself. Three can keep counsel when two are away. I didn't invite him and I won't be made responsible for him."

"You take it very lightly," said Lady Theo disappointed of her effect; "but you have aided the escape of a suspected character. Miss Arden,"

I am convinced, would be more careful whom she knew."

Daisy trembled like a guilty thing surprised, but Raggleston wagged his head.

"You should be more careful, Maud," he said. "If you are seen about with all sorts of scallywags—"

Daisy moved uneasily, but Lady Theo cried delightedly, "You see Mr. Raggleston is of my opinion."

Lady Maud bit her veil in a rage and bided her time.

"This Beauclerk has deceived your father and you and Mr. West, but he never deceived me. My work among the lower classes enables me to recognise a criminal at a glance. I don't mean that his type was pronounced," she said addressing herself to Daisy, who had uttered an insuppressible cry of protest. "His appearance would have deceived you, too, no doubt."

"Never!" said Daisy with unexpected firmness.

"Yet you are very easily imposed on," said Lady Maud, spitefully, swinging her foot and glowering at Raggleston.

"Now I, for instance," cried Lady Theo,

"should know him again anywhere and in any disguise."

As she spoke, the guard, outside the carriage door, let out his gathered impatience into his whistle, and, as the train stirred, turned to meet his van on its outward progress, and Raggleston's head, which had been hanging out of the window, was withdrawn as a belated foreigner in the last stage of excitement, cast himself upon the official's breast, demanding, "the first class of Surwood, you show me him, hein?"

In three swift movements the prompt guard opened their door, cast the alien from himself and through it, slammed it behind him, and was past.

Lady Theo snatched at her parasol, but was too late to save her string bag on which the newcomer came down to the sound of cracking biscuits and snapped knitting needles.

Disconcerted for the moment she was soon mollified by his expression of his desolation. Like the wise lady in Wonderland, she cried out much louder before an evil than after it. To do her justice she had some share of philosophy. Mistress of herself, did anything fall she never hastened to pick up the pieces. Once down it won't

suffer from lying, she would remark. Her nephew who had the hereditary knack of detecting serviceable qualities in others, had been first attracted to her side by her manly insensitiveness to the sight of a glass on the edge of a table. Equilibrium asserts itself there as well as in the middle she had permitted herself to say, and the boy had treasured the pronouncement for home use, to the widening of the family breach.

She was now considering her neighbour pretty frankly, and not without a kindly interest. As an evolutionist, she would have pointed out, she regarded a Frenchman not as a specially created lower form, but as a thing of possibilities—an undeveloped Englishman. Fundamentally convinced moreover that Truth is always recognised if properly displayed—that a heathen is a Christian in want of a missionary, and an aboriginal black an innocent demoralised by the colonials—she always spoke kindly to continentals and would animadvert on the manners of her countrymen whose bearing was calculated unduly to depress and discourage them in their struggle towards the light. The Latin race was lower than the Anglo-Saxon, no doubt, as the yellow race is be-

hind the white, but much might be done by cultivation. Could the Pope be induced to read the Bible, the Frenchman's moral standard be raised, and the German be weaned from beer and militarism, the tribes of the continent might yet approximate to the Chosen People.

Casual conversation in a railway carriage was a favourite gambit in the game of leading strangers by devious moves up to her masked batteries, and she soon had her neighbour in conduct along a path to bring him within range. And everyone spoke up today; there was no occasion to ask "what."

"And what are you doing here? Are you travelling for pleasure?"

"I travel to know your language and observe your 'abits," replied the stranger with docility.

This was excellent well.

"Habit we say," she corrected. "And how do we strike you?"

"Strike me? Ze box, hein?"

"No, no; I mean what do you think of our habits?"

But apparently the glint of Raggleston's new hat had thrown the stranger off the rails again.

"The 'abits of the men are beautiful," he said, gazing at Raggleston with admiration through his gold-rimmed glass. "Like what you call a wedding garment."

Raggleston shook himself sulkily, and got rather red about the ears. Lady Theo *tchicked* with impatience, but she was led to look at Raggleston also.

"You are certainly very smart today, Mr. Raggleston, if I may be permitted to say so."

"Would you like me to look like *that,*" he said, indicating her neighbour.

This was a desirable opening, and the insularity and insolence of Mr. Raggleston were properly punished before he could decently retire behind his paper again.

"You young people," she concluded, looking round her, "could learn much even in a railway carriage, if you chose."

"You also travel for information?" inquired the Frenchman innocently.

"I do nothing without a reason," she replied, casting a reflection on the company. "For instance, do you know why I travel first-class? Because the seats are divided"—she patted the leath-

ern arm-rests on each side of her. "Because it's cheaper," she paused for a contradiction. "The other classes are less expensive, but they all subject one to the pressure always put upon the undersized; and when your neighbours overlap you they travel to an appreciable extent at your expense. Why do I carry my lunch in a bag? Because if I satisfy my modest hunger at an hotel there is not a man in the room who is not eating at my cost. Two shillings worth of cold beef is eaten, six-penny worth by me, and eighteen-penny worth by him, and we each pay a shilling. When I meet some grenadier of a woman on my dressmaker's staircase I know that whole yards of her dress are down on my bill. Her gloves and her boots cost her no more than mine cost me. An overgrown creature sits in front of me at the theatre. He sees the piece and I see him. And we pay the same. It is a great injustice. In a day of fixed prices it is well to be big. The necessaries of life are pooled and the value averaged per head of the population. We all pay alike at the door, so to speak, and consume all we can on the strawberry-garden principle, and one eats a peck where another can only manage a

pottle. Big hands, big feet and a big appetite proclaim the social parasite. Income-tax should be adjusted to stature."

"That is ver' true," affirmed her neighbour, careful not to lean on the arm of her seat. "One man will drink whisky soda—one, two, tree, four —go after pretty girl—one two, tree—"

"Tut, tut!" said Lady Theo.

"Wear the fine clothes, have good time, beano, hein? Other man he pay for all, have bad time, shocking!"

Lady Maud giggled, and Raggleston kept behind his paper, but Clapham being reached he thrust his head out for some air, quickly withdrawing it with the muttered remark, "Let 'em all come," as Bobby Vane put his hand on the carriage door.

Greatly charmed at the sight of Daisy, he asked if there was room.

"Yes, there is a place for you, Mr. Vane," said Daisy.

For him! was it his fancy that she laid soft stress on the word? He sat down by her, and opposite to Beauclerk, at whom he gazed with a patent effort to place him. His arrival recharged

the atmosphere with nervousness, and fear for themselves which had been dispelled since, by their united efforts, Lady Theodosia had been hoisted onto her hobby-horse to tilt at windmills, now repossessed them.

Paul hesitated to bestow a wink on him, fearing its reflection from his unsuspicious face. Daisy sought by more than ordinary graciousness and by introducing him to the other two ladies to distract his attention, and Raggleston by a ruder diplomacy to put him out of countenance.

Bobby pleased with his impression at first responded to the softer wiles. But he was hypnotised by the stranger and his place of origin and connection with the Ardens gradually came back to him. He opened his mouth to broach the matter when Raggleston on the watch, inquired:

"Been to any more night clubs, you dissipated rooster?"

"Night clubs!" cried Lady Theodosia, up again, "who goes to night clubs?"

"*He* does," said the unsportsmanlike friend. "Mr. Vane is a dog."

"It is a very bad account of a young man!" she cried. "Dog is the word! Do you know,

Mr. Vane, that I never meet a young man but I ask myself, has he a tail?"

Even Daisy laughed this time.

"A young man with a bad habit has a very ugly appendage! Man is supposed to have shed his tail, but it appears again, at least to me, when he returns to bad ways. If it is allowed to grow the tail begins to wag the dog. Then the dog gets a bad name, and then you know what happens."

"He is 'anged," said the foreigner, placidly, who by this time had made himself her ally and echo. "Oh, yes. I know him—your idiom. *Honneur* among thieves. 'E who fights and rons away leeves to fight nozzer day. Devil take ze 'indmost."

She smiled upon him indulgently, but Bobby, who had certainly been abominably treated, said:

"You could talk English last time I met you, Beauclerk."

The shot landed right in the magazine, and the defenders held their breath.

Lady Theodosia started and the satisfaction faded from her face. She looked, winced, and

looked again. Then with a sudden recoil she shrank into her corner as from a snake.

The train slowed down and stopped as silence fell, and Mr. Beauclerk, now presented to the company, slipped without adieu or apology from the compartment, and left his character behind him.

CHAPTER XV

IN FRONT

A SPRINKLE of rain daunted the issuing passengers and congested the exit, but Paul was one of the first through, and turning up his collar ran for the town hall, a matter of a couple of hundred yards up the street.

Large yellow bills flanked the steps, and what with the uncertainty of the weather, the distinguished patronage promised, the charitable purpose, and the kindly hopes of seeing friends and relations making an exhibition of themselves, the hall promised to fill. He paid his shilling, and as his unusual purpose was to get at the back instead of the front he was not balked of it, and secured a bench-end against the wall in the back row under the shadow of the

gallery and within the sphere of influence of an open window. The excessive heat at amateur theatricals is no doubt due in a measure to the feverishness of the performers. At any rate it is a marked symptom.

Here he sat concealed, and presently saw his party enter. Lady Theodosia first, lips compressed, and looking neither right nor left. There had evidently been words. The others, on the contrary, were looking everywhere—for him.

He dived promptly and read his programme, where he found not only Lady Theodosia down as a patroness, but the patronage of the Marquis of Horsham, K. G., extended right across the page. It was no new thing, but a week ago the Marquis and his family had been less to him than the call-boy or the programme sellers. "He won't come," he concluded. "He has only lent his name." His own name was on the programme. That was evidence of its early printing—unless Billinghurst was minded to shield the blame of his performance behind the good name of another.

This was a mortifying reflection. He had sacrificed the conduct and brief career of Lord

Beauclerk at the call of Duty, but he had not foreseen that his own professional reputation would be injured. It was a dastardly act. That Billinghurst should murder his favourite creature was an outrage—that it should be done in his name was an abomination. He had clung to his make-up in the vague hope of some timely failure of his understudy—he might yet properly fill the breach and save the situation in its entirety; and this in spite of the fact that the conditions demanding his absence from any stage were still, so far as he knew, in existence. But the opening was yet to be found.

The front of the hall filled with colour and movement as rain and dust cloaks were removed, the back had been filled with drab for some time, stiller in its mass as more tightly packed, and the light spray of wet brought out the odour of broadcloth and boot-polish.

Bobby, early taken by a press-gang of sisters, was flying up and down, all arms and legs, showing families into wrong seats, and a great buzz of talk filled the confined air.

The footlights were already up and the curtain bulged and wavered, shadowing the instalment

of staggering scenery; and violent noises, heralded or followed by stifled shouts, came from the back of beyond.

Paul listened grimly. The Surwood D. C. had been born to better things. Under his management order had reigned and such an occasion would never have been marred by the inefficiency of the half-baked amateur.

A reporter leaned against the wall at his elbow. Paul saw him note the passage of a Paquin costume, and himself not unimpressed asked the name as soon as the reporter had returned his pencil to his teeth.

"Heimer," said the newsman through his pencil.

"Miss Heimer—ah!" he nodded in recognition. "Great heiress, is she not?"

"Millions," confirmed the reporter. "'Merican, I b'lieve."

Miss Heimer stood for a moment observed of all, calmly arguing with the flustered Bobby; then subsided into the seat of her choice and became invisible as a settled butterfly.

And now the band struck up, and innumerable matrons, suddenly reminded after half an hour's

talk that they had something to say, straightened unsatisfied heads from the confidential angle, and sat suffering from suppressed conversation.

The band ceased, the lights went down, the curtain went up, a few frenzied whispers found vent, and Miss Vane was disclosed sitting on a milking stool singing a stave of a simple ditty expressive of her artless maidenhood.

Paul stood up in his agitation. Yes, the scene was rightly set, Molly looked well, spoke slowly, and faced her audience courageously, and had given up talking into her flower-basket.

"She has no business to be sitting there, though. That's Beauclerk's entrance. Ten to one she leaves the stool there and he falls over it. I told her again and again about that," he fumed. "But perhaps Billinghurst has a comic entry over the obstacle."

The bitter jest proved bitter fact. The raffiné nobleman, wandering into the rural retreat in his Piccadilly clothes, stumbled elaborately over the stool prepared for him, raising shouts of delight from Paul's neighbours as he surveyed the legs of his trousers through his eyeglass,

which he held—yes, held—to his eye between his finger and thumb.

Paul reeled against the reporter.

"'Ullo," said the reporter; "feelin' queer?"

"It's nothing," he said faintly, "the heat—"

"That's young Arden," said the other, unwilling to miss anything; "he's a funny fellow, I hear."

Roars of laughter from the audience.

"Did you see that?" cried the reporter in high glee; "my word! but she smacked his face for him."

With folded arms and furious set countenance Paul stood and watched the development of the act and the degradation of his part.

Far from word-perfect Billinghurst did not hesitate to gag, and his dissolute example had plainly loosened the fabric so carefully woven by his predecessor. But it stood the strain fairly, and when the act closed and applause marked it an assured success he felt that his work had not been thrown away.

His neighbours were wiping tears of joy from their cheeks and the reporter's experienced pencil was evidently favourable.

"Not much like a reel lord, though, is he?" he said. "But he's an amusing young chap, that Arden."

"His name is not Arden," said Paul irritably; "Arden is not acting. That was his understudy."

"Reely," said the reporter, opening his notebook again; "do you know who it is?"

"I know Mr. Arden," said Paul, but the evasion was fatal to his credit.

"Ah! off the stage pr'aps," said the reporter with an annoying smile. "I dessay you don't reconnise him."

"Nonsense," said Paul, with growing irritation; "I tell you it is not Mr. Arden."

"Then who is it?" said the reporter. "Tell me that—who is it?"

He looked round him, for others were drawing to the dispute, and Paul found himself unpopular from the start, as one seeking to deprive the public of a name printed on its bill of fare.

"'Ow does *'e* know?" expressed the general sense.

A fireman whom Paul had never seen in his

life before claimed acquaintance with the whole cast.

"Not but that the stage is wonderful deceiving, with the lights an' all that—but I know Mr. Arden well enough. Though, mind you," he said to Paul, being a temperate man, though of a stout and fiery appearance—"I never see'd him act as well as today."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Paul, his feelings mastering him, "he couldn't have done it worse."

"Perhaps you could have done it better," said the reporter, getting in the telling counter *ad hominem.*

Paul was floored, of course, and the crowd jumped on him.

"Some people's so ready to set everyone right, and it's always them as knows least," said one matron, but her companion, who sat on Paul's left, said more compassionately: "There's folks as don't seem able to enjoy themselves nowhere. I'm sure you may take 'em to circuses and shows and what not and they'll sit looking moped as miserable. It's their 'ealth likely," she pursued, in all sympathy, contemplating the subject of her discourse. "'E looks sickly. 'E reminds me

of my poor 'usband when 'e was alive. 'E's often said to me, 'well, what you can see to laugh at beats me,' 'e'd say. 'E'd often say that to me. 'Can't see what you're a-laughin' at,' 'e'd say. Only a week before 'e was buried—an' 'e was buried on a Tuesday, a wet day it was, 'e never did like rain—I remember, Lizzy—you know what a laugher Liz is—she says to him, 'why, James,' she says, 'I've bought new black for your funeral,' she says. 'I do 'ope,' she says, 'you'll leave me something to pay for it.' We all laughed—well—there! But 'e 'ad never a smile. There's some that's like that."

The other lady agreed, but thought that in this case it came from being "stuck up." "Some young fellows think so much of themselves that there's no bearing with them," she complained.

Paul sat in gloomy subjection, and heard without defence the fireman retailing anecdotes of himself and Mr. Arden and other members of the company.

The piece proceeded and got to the third act. The lights had just gone down when a heavy hand on his shoulder pressed the owner into a seat by him. It was Raggleston.

"Couldn't find you till now," he whispered. "I thought I had better tell you that Lord Horsham has promised to look in before it is over. Lady Theo—" he chuckled—"is beginning to suspect, but hasn't spotted Billinghurst yet. But the old man will—in a second. Can't you do anything? Warn Billinghurst, or kill him, or something? He's playing the fool with that girl, and his sister's wild, and his father—by Jove! here he is."

Two forms moved up the dark aisle, preceded by some fussy stewards, and for a moment the blackened profile of Lord Horsham and his secretary showed against the rim of the lighted stage. Beauclerk was not on in the early part of this act, but was due at the close—a disillusioned and repentant rake seeking his final happiness in the deserted milkmaid of the opening scene—a situation Paul had nursed and studied with ardour and artistry—the moment of the piece.

And Billinghurst—he shuddered. Inaction was impossible. He would at least go behind.

"I'll go with you," said Raggleston, and they slipped from the darkened hall into the dazzling afternoon light, and hurried round to the back of the building, where they dived into cool obscurity,

down a flight of stone steps and up another, stayed by no janitors, rather to Raggleston's astonishment, who knew something of the dragons of the stage-door.

A swing-door faced them across a stone landing, and Paul, opening it softly, shut it again quickly, and beckoning Raggleston to look closely over his shoulder, opened it again some three inches. Raggleston applied his eye to the crack, filled his lungs for a syren-like whistle, but let it out gently.

The door gave onto a narrow space off the wings, and just within it stood Billinghurst, waiting for his cue, laughing and talking to a man who sat on a cane chair with his back to them as they peeped. But the yellow hair parted behind was as individual as a face. It was the moribund attaché.

The swing-door was let to with infinite softness, and with full hearts the sinner and the scapegoat ground each other against the wall.

Raggleston was for hurling Billinghurst incontinently among the footlights, but the other with ready counsel and local authority took the upper hand.

They passed the door, Paul fled like a shadow up the wings to the dressing-rooms, and Raggleston alone met the startled gaze of the turned heads.

"How are you, Deggendorf?" he asked, gruffly, grasping his hand as if it had been the handle of a try-your-grip machine.

The German looked pale and rose gingerly, and bowed even more stiffly than was usual with him, but he appeared in good spirits, and returned the pressure quite heartily and with all the good feeling in the world.

Raggleston struggled to say something more, but couldn't shape it, and turned on Lord Billinghurst, who was dancing a graceful and silent *pas seul,* the extended skirts of his frock-coat between his fingers.

"Who'd have thought of seeing you!" said his lordship, blandly, "and don't you think I write an effective style? Play on the affections, and all that? Upon my word, Jack, do you know I nearly cried over that letter." He danced emotionally. "Molly thought it capital." He nodded to where the milkmaid sat in a woodland

path of tan-coloured drugget ten paces from them, soliloquising in a rustic solitude.

"Don't waste your tears," said Raggleston; "when I get you out of here you'll want 'em. And as to Molly, as you call her—"

"I say," said the noble amateur, stopping short in his saraband, "don't let on to Arden about this. He will—he might not like my rendering of the character, don't you know. He's quite happy in Sussex—but there's my cue. I'm off—I mean I'm on."

He turned to go, but his passage was stopped by an outstretched arm—an arm which used no violence—only raised itself in silent protest on his path.

CHAPTER XVI

BEHIND

HIS prototype and present double stood in front of him, looking with caustic glance on his debased and capering duplicate. The broader markings of the wandered Frenchman had gone like a garment, and the original Lord Beauclerk, touched with but a suspicion of Norman ancestry in his conquering glance, stood posed for action.

"Arden, by Jove!" faltered the other, brought up short. "But you must tell me your little tale afterwards," he said, bluffing briskly, and trying to pass the barrier hand.

The tardy but repentant nobleman deigned no response. He looked at Raggleston, and on the instant the impostor was enfolded in a bear's hug from behind.

"It is my cue!" he cried desperately, and struggled to get free. From the stage, o. p. Molly was repeating in tones that began to take a genuine ring, "He comes no more—alas, I am forsaken!" and the stage manager was heard dashing madly across the back-cloth.

"Let me go, you idiot, I am wanted!" cried the comedian. Lord Beauclerk rested a quelling eye on his wriggling understudy.

"There is no harlequinade," he said, with icy hauteur, and turning trod the boards.

A moment later and Molly was folded in his embrace, and the surprise in her scream moved even her admirers to respectful astonishment.

Beauclerk's best chest-notes touched with tremor, asked her pardon of his neglect—regretted his profligate career. Had she forgotten him—had another filled his place in her esteem?

Hysterical with emotion, the overtaken damsel could but hide her head on his shoulder and gaze on him with a bewilderment and apparent rapture of recovery that drew murmurs of applause. Even the believing family of Vane raised approving brows. They had not thought she had it in her.

The scene filled. Good old parents, subordinate lovers, faithful servants, prosperous uncle, all looked in without further excuse than the finale afforded, and each and all met the prodigal Beauclerk on his return to his early love, with broken sentences of surprise, which spoke volumes for their common knowledge of his lurid career, and carried dark doubts into the back of the room, where the question was mooted whether she did well to have him after all. But there was no doubt among the fireman's friends that Arden was Arden—

"Wonderful 'ow 'e changed his voice at the end—spoke out so manly—you could see 'e'd turned over a new leaf."

The concluding sentiment was delivered—by Lord Beauclerk, the curtain ran down to loud applause, rose and fell again, then thrust back from the proscenium let pass the players in detail. Beauclerk and Molly acknowledged the partial raptures of their friends, and the former with the pride of the conscious artist, and the recovered rectitude of the man, faced the scrutiny of the front rows in untroubled serenity.

As he backed against the drop, and Molly

crossed him, and he bowed over the flaring footlights before he followed her, he heard Lord Horsham say:

"Call him what you like, that's the fellow who visited me!"

"Well, *I* call him Beauclerk," said Lady Theodosia in decided accents, and waved her programme. But West waved his—

"I call him Arden," he said.

The house was on its feet and a relieved burst of comment, talk and laughter overcame the hurly-burly of feet and chairs. The big doors were thrown wide, and the blinking audience pushed gradually through to the daylight and to its five o'clock tea; but a distinguished few who had relatives behind the curtain or were otherwise raised above their fellow men, knew of an informal reception in costume by the S. D. C. on the stage—in the very glamour of the limelight—and held their ground.

But behind the curtain was dispute and clamour. The S. D. C. was divided against itself.

The middle of the stage was held, too late, by Lord Billinghurst, complaining bitterly of his

treatment, and he found a strong supporter in Miss Vane, who felt that she had been trifled with. Greatly ruffled, her speech was no longer of love and lifelong intimacy. Far from it. She would never act with Paul again, who had behaved abominably—thrown her out and made her forget her words—thrown up his part and then returned and walked on as if nothing had happened—without a word of apology—

"I stuck to my text," said Paul, grimly.

"I'll never help you again at a pinch," said Billinghurst.

"Save me from my friends," replied Paul. "You nearly spoilt the whole play."

"I am the play," said Paul, unperturbed.

Raggleston and von Deggendorf tried to make peace.

"Absurd to quarrel," urged Raggleston; "too childish. Never done. Kiss and be friends. I've always been curious to see the stage-kiss at close quarters."

Molly flounced off.

"Tea is ready," said the German. "They will clear the stage."

This argument was more successful. There

was a general move and performers and public began to mingle

Among the first over the footlights were Daisy, Lady Maud, and Miss Heimer, all in search of their men-folk.

The millionairess created something of a stampede among her former suitors as she swept across the boards.

Paul, still close-wrapped in his impersonation, stood o. p. leaning on his cane, one hand high up on his waistcoat, one foot crossed over the other—defiant to man and irresistible to maid.

"Mr. Arden, I presume," said the fair American.

Shorn of his style, a shade of regret fell on him, but he bowed in assent.

"I have to thank you for your good offices. As a matrimonial agent you are a vurry bright particular star, Mr. Arden. But your young men have not presented themselves to me, to date. Produce them, Mr. Arden."

Raggleston had been hiding behind a tree, but thoughtlessly leaning against it now nearly felled the grove.

"Mr. Raggleston, you need not take to the

woods. I am not looking for you with a gun, you are looking for *me* I should judge. You hoped to find me behind that goober-tree, did you not, now? Mr. Raggleston on a quest! Fancy! You are up a tree, but you don't appear to be on the stump. You are not conversational. I pause for a reply. Your ideas don't exactly bubble forth, Mr. Raggleston."

The fiery suitor of ten days past was an uncomfortable and shuffling spectacle, desperately engaged, as he afterwards put it, in clawing himself off a lee shore; but his seamanship would never have saved him, he confessed, had not the storm centre shifted, and Billinghurst, convoying Molly to the refreshment tables in a favouring breeze, been taken aback and brought up all standing.

"And Lord Billinghurst. You do surprise me. If you had brought that moo-stash to bear on me in my unattached condition, I should have succumbed to the first smile. And you've lost your way too? But I do appreciate your delicacy in getting a substitute for the last act. You will explain all, will you not?" She stretched her gloved hands in dramatic entreaty, and Billinghurst, anathematising the quest, and the tell-tale Baron,

and wincing from the stony British stare of Molly to the impassioned gaze of the Heimer, stood between the Amazons wishing himself back between the swords. "Von Deggendorf," he stammered.

And Herr von Deggendorf, who had shown signs of uneasiness and disapproval, now sought to interrupt.

"Julius, one word and you go home to bed this instant minute. You are not to agitate yourself."

But the German who is reared in submission to man does not submit himself to woman. Ignoring her protest, he bowed ceremoniously to the company and delivered himself of momentous matter. "I have the honour to dell you that I have been engaged—*heimlich verlobt*—to the Fraulein Heimer this two month. But it is now no longer zecret."

"Sold again, Jack!" cried Billinghurst, delighted. "I congratulate you, von Deggendorf! Forgive us, Miss Heimer! Two months—it is you who have trifled with our affections."

Miss Heimer smiled brilliantly and smoothed the glove on her stretched wrist.

"Julius, you have disobeyed me. But make the most of your liberty. Yes. I marry Julius in September and we cross in the fall. Mr. Raggleston has already issued the invitations, I understand, so we shall hope to see you."

Raggleston was inclined to take his reverses hard, as was his wont, but Daisy, who had come up in time for the announcement, urged him to civilities. Miss Heimer, of whose good nature Daisy had made an easy conquest at the first glance, took him back into grace on the spot, "though I should have been vurry seriously annoyed with you if you had spoiled his beauty," she said.

The embarrassed swordsman was glad to fall back on his old adversary, and drawing him aside Paul and Billinghurst joined them, eager to ply the German with questions.

"It was a nothing," said the Freiherr.

"It was several inches," said Raggleston, with conviction, but under his breath

"I thought you were killed," said Billinghurst, "you lay so deuced still."

"I haf thought so too," said the Freiherr, pla-

cidly. "I knew not, but I lay sdill in the case that I was moch hurt. It was better so."

They congratulated him on his presence of mind, but pressed for details. It appeared that the point had glanced obliquely across his very well-nourished chest. Raggleston was right as to the penetration, but wrong as to the direction. As Arden had said, he had bled very effectively, and his condition, and his care for himself, had impressed Lord Horsham. But the wound once dressed had healed rapidly.

Arden and Raggleston gazed on him with thankfulness, but with a certain soreness all the same. Their feelings had been played with. He might have let them down with a perforation of the intercostal spaces, or at least a touch of septicæmia. But after all it was the double-faced and double-dyed schemer Billinghurst who should pay. They engaged themselves to dine with him, Arden to name the hostel, Raggleston the wine, and Billinghurst to foot the bill merrily all the way to the small hours.

They were broken in upon by Lord Horsham, who appeared at Paul's elbow stirring a cup of tea.

"Delighted to meet you on your native heath, Lord Beauclerk," he said, with a grave inclination and a glint in his eye. "Had I known that I was entertaining a man of your lordship's quality in my poor house you should have been treated with more consideration. But I trust that you were comfortable at the Paddocks."

Paul, out of countenance at last, was grateful when Lady Maud put in—

"Of course he was. Would you reflect on his hostess?"

"You certainly sped the parting guest, however you welcomed him," said her father, raking the circle from under his brows over the rim of his cup. "But whom have we here?" he said, staring at his son—"a twin Antipholus? Is this your dissolute foster-brother—the mythical Arden—West's find? A most abandoned looking scamp! No doubt the villain of the piece?"

Billinghurst stared sulkily at Raggleston, who gazed coolly back, quite convinced by now that he was more sinned against than sinner.

"Well, will no one enlighten me? Who got through your ard, von Deggendorf?"

"Niemand!" replied the German, promptly, "if my foot haf not slip—"

Lord Horsham laughed and turned away, but Billinghurst had not done with his relatives. Lady Theodosia faced him with some severity, and her opening words commanded attention from all:

"Well, Mr. Beauclerk," she said, "or whatever your name may be, I suppose I must forgive you for the sake of your sister—for I have taken a great liking to her. And I don't mind telling you in confidence that I wish my nephew would do the same, for his taste is to be deplored."

His movement of violent impatience should have opened the good lady's eyes, but the truth was that they were fixed on Miss Vane, who was exhibiting herself to some enthusiastic friends further up the stage.

"Herbert Spencer," she pursued, with more than the calmness of all the proprietary right to a hearing, of the platform orator as the delighted circle closed in—"Herbert Spencer has pointed out that hunting animals have the eyes placed in front, the hunted at the sides of the

head. That this is not the case in man and woman refutes the popular notion that man invariably pursues and that woman invariably flees. But when the sidelong glance is an advantage in the chase it will reappear—and I have never seen this better exemplified than in the case of that young woman with the milking stool under her arm. Her eye is working round."

Violently tearing off his wig and moustache, and dashing his eyeglass on the boards, Lord Billinghurst stalked away to the dressing-rooms.

Raggleston, awakened to adverse schemes in a world he had always looked upon as his oyster, returned to Daisy.

The Freiherr, whose convalescence cried insistently for nourishment, could hold out no longer. Leaning his big body over Lady Theodosia's hand, arrested in mid-gesture, he hooked it under his arm. "Permit that I gif you some dea or goffee," he said.

Speechless, she was led away.

Lady Maud and Paul lingered, looking across the footlights down the empty hall.

"What's to really be?" quoted Lady Maud,

with enthusiasm. *"A clear stage and a crowd to see?"*

"The crowd is unnecessary," said Paul Arden.

THE END

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